

# A LINE FROM THE TOWER OF BABBLE | NORMAN RAE

LONDON: AS RE-INITIATION into London's West End theatre offerings, I sallied forth set on seeing London's latest musical hit, "Evita," based on the career of Argentina's Eva Peron and directed by the American wonder producer/director of success after success, Harold Prince. I blithely thought it might be possible to find a single seat on such a freezing winter evening without booking in advance.

If I hadn't been told, I'd have known without a doubt - by the indicator I shall now tell you about - "Evita" must be the hottest current property in town. The theatre booking office had shut its window firmly and put up its 'sold out' sign. Not even a top price (six pounds sterling) ticket to be entreated.

At such a time one tends to emerge on to the pavement looking slightly dazed and with that absent minded air of someone trying to figure out what else to do now that one had battled into theatreland. Enter the scalpers, ticket scalpers that is. A phenomenon, I think unknown in Jamaica where, if you have returned tickets for a performance you're only too glad if someone comes along to buy them off you at the regular price.

Scalpers make their money by buying up in advance tickets for the super-favourites. When the performances sell out, they wait on the pavement for the folk who simply must get in and then they make their killing. I'd forgotten about them and must have seemed incredibly naive during the following encounter.

It is one minute to showtime. Rae stands uncertainly on the pavement and a young man approaches (whom I think to be somebody whose escort hasn't made it).

He (politely) Want a ticket for the show sir?  
 Me Yes. What price is it?  
 He Thirty pounds sir.  
 Me Thirty pounds? I can't afford that!  
 He Twenty pounds?  
 Me No.  
 He How much are you willing to pay?  
 Me (still in state of mild shock) Well, I hadn't been thinking of spending more than at most six

pounds. He (moving away with sense of outrage) That's ridiculous!  
 End of conversation. (Note to anecdote: at current rates of exchange, thirty pounds comes out at slightly more than a hundred Jamaican dollars).

Rae glimpses at the corner at the glittering lights advertising Jesus Christ Superstar by the same team, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, who wrote "Evita." Now in its seventh year it holds the record of London's longest running musical ever.

I've never been an aficionado of 'Superstar' even when the recording first appeared (it was one of these unusual occurrences where the work achieved vast popularity in its recorded form long before it was mounted on the stage). A rock oratorio, it seemed to me to depend a great deal on the gimmick of doing the passion of Christ in that style rather than on the quality of the work itself.

Hence, until the particular evening I've been telling you about, I managed successfully to avoid it. But I have an odd reputation in this respect. Many, many years ago, I kept telling people about a little musical that began in Bristol called 'Salad Days'. They must see it. I was away on the European continent when the show opened in London and, in all the years it ran, never did get around myself to going.

Then, someone once rang up and said they'd got tickets for the opening night of a new musical. I said (this again is umpteen years ago): a British musical based on Charles Dickens' No, thank you! Well, that one, of course, was "Oliver" (which is having a revival here).

On another occasion, we went to the first night of a play which I thought unnecessarily obscure, rather tedious (in a way that 'Waiting For Godot' with all its mystification wasn't) and headed for a quick close. That was "The Caretaker," Harold Pinter's first box office triumph with Donald Pleasance and the late Robert Shaw who wasn't so well known then.

In New York where it was first staged, "Superstar" offered director Tom O'Horgan another opportunity, as he had had in "Hair," to create an

organic flow of movement, theatrical effect and hippie-new around episodic, allusive material. All of this with an energy that still comes through in the London version (credited to another director, Jim Sharman) these many years after.

The stage takes on a monumental aspect despite the modern touches of lighting the central areas from below through glazed squares. Panels slide apart. Depths are revealed. Every so often dramatic mists blow on from the wings or from the underworld. The cast performs on lower stage, middle stage, upper stage, steeply raked ramps at the side. Some of the musicians in habit cubicles on stage, the rest sit modestly in the orchestra pit. The movement is precise, sometimes with tongue in cheek. At the end, Jesus on the cross (with a brightly interior-lighted base) elevates on a shaft from subterranea while the enormous East chants its songs of contemporary praise. The things is worth viewing for the awesomeness of the mechanics alone if for no other reason.

Herod, now being played by Barry James who's had six years at the National Theatre and looks like a black-haired Bobby Ghysays in mafia, continues to walk away with the show-stopper, a rowdy vaudeville-style number. The original New York Herod kicked off the fashion in highheeled and soled shoes for men. I don't know whether Herod Londonas has been re-costumed recently or whether he pre-empted the gentlermz tuz te xcv looks John Travolta-ish in white suit and black shirt bot tomed off with a pair of glittering silver boots.

Useless bits of information department: an item carried on television here quotes an American Doctor John Diamond's finding that the noise of rock music can reduce muscle power by as much as 50 per cent. The deltoid muscle in the neck area being the most affected. Classified music on the other hand has strengthening power. He claims Travolta, Alice Cooper and a group known as The Queen, among others, to be more damaging than the rest. The Queen has issued a denial.

Then there was the brief chat with a Britisher who has changed his name by deed poll to Marlon Brando. He has a son who as a result, now rejoices in the appellation Errol Flynn Brando.



Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gelsey Kirkland in a scene from 'The Nutcracker'.

## The Nutcracker

Reviewed by Harry Milner

The filmed version of the Tchaikovsky's final ballet, "Casse Noisette," (The Nutcracker) was sponsored by IBM, and had a showing last Tuesday night at the ICA auditorium in the Mutual Life Building. It is intended that there should be more performances at the IBM itself. The film was exhibited on TV in black and white during the Christmas season on JBC, but many people must have missed it in the general jollifications. Moreover it gains a great deal in living colour.

I have never seen "Casse Noisette" on stage, but Michael Barashnikov's newly adapted version, I found more moving than either "Lac Des Cygnes" or "The Sleeping Beauty." It was Tchaikovsky's final score for the dancing theatre, and although some of the diversification numbers in the second act have become over familiar through recordings of the Suite, they are brought to life by the dancing and choreography, and the basic theme of the wonder and bewilderment of a child drifting in one magic night from the acceptance of childhood to the pain and bewilderment and beauty of adolescence is caught exquisitely in both the choreography and the immortal music. I have now seen this film twice and each time the wondrous sadness of the closing shot and poignant fading music brought tears to my eyes.

The potent effect of this ballet-film, is due not only to the perfect dancing of both Barashnikov and Gelsey Kirkland, but to the quite incredible acting performance of Kirkland, who in the first half, where she mainly mimes she actually manages to look like a Russian Alice in Wonderland on the edge of her teens ready to catch the heart of a Lewis Carroll. If she could only speak as well as she can dance and mime, here would be the perfect Juliet.

### • Superb

Barashnikov is superb from beginning to end with a fantastic technique, observable especially when he was the Nutcracker Soldier. His clockwork walking and his fight with the King of the Mice were character dancing at their best, as indeed were the great pas de deux with his prima ballerina and solos which lead to the finale of the work.

This ballet follows rather the convention of Giselle with the First Act semi-naturalist and the Second heightened, more abstract and mystical. Barashnikov manages to include quite a deal of humour into the Christmas Eve party with some doddering old dancers and a tiresome young drunk, who pulls off the head of the young girl's treasured toy.

Dancers are also intentionally inclined to slip up when least expected. Expect for the great solos and pas de deux at the end of the dream scenes. I found the second act as filmed less moving and satisfying than the first. In black and white and even in pastel I found the Waltz of the Flowers too faintly photographed and the diversifications in the Dream Palace seemed only moderately danced. I fear, to be a contrast to the stellar performances of the leads.

The Magician, or Fate figure was acted and mimed by somebody whose name I did not catch, and he was especially moving in the adagio, which is this ballet's particular Dialogue for three, in which Death, or Fate, or what have you warns the sire that love, joy, youth or even life are not for ever.

## Palladium to honour Bing Crosby

LONDON, Feb 1 (Reuter CANA)

A plaque is to be placed in London's Palladium Theatre in honour of Bing Crosby, the theatre announced today.

It said the plaque would commemorate the fact that the last week of the singer's working life was spent before capacity audiences in a Palladium engagement celebrating his 50 years as an entertainer.

Bing died of a heart attack on October 14, 1977 while playing golf in Spain. He was 73.

His widow Kathryn has written to the theatre saying Bing felt that appearing at the Palladium was the highlight of his career.

The Palladium has accorded the distinction of a plaque to only one other star, Judy Garland.

## 'Johnny Reggae' — The old formula

JOHNNIE REGGAE is the Little Theatre Movement's 38th consecutive yearly Christmas Pantomime. It is also one of the LTM's longer productions running at just over three hours, and follows the traditional contemporary formula of more original former successes.

Without detracting from the production's merits, I feel it is a pity the LTM does not apply to its scripts the same degree of innovation usually found in their other technical and artistic areas. The old and shopworn theme of the poor, boy-girl with a mother/grandmother and the inevitable hard struggles against adversity resulting in success and recognition is too familiar for most audiences. Hence, the accent is purely on getting laughs, and at any cost. Just as how I find so-called ethnic jokes an abomination so I regard with even more distaste the obvious effort to 'put down the Rastafaris' by using the unique faith as the bun of several highly prejudicial 'jokes'. As a Rastafari myself I was not amused. The LTM's scriptwriters instead of making sick fun of Rastafaris, should begin to project the culture in a much more realistic and positive manner.

Having got that one off my chest, I found the musical very exciting although there were some dull spots. There were some fine moments chiefly engineered by the comic duo of Franchot Henry and Gary Harvey (Booioo and Spengeh). Winston Whutter's hilarious dame, Mrs. Dry up, Gabrielle Harban as Cuic the Vamp, and Ranny Williams and Oliver Samuels alternating as the Jeckel and

Hyde villain, Mr Nuffus/Baldhead.

The leads were disappointing and I found the first cast much stronger than the second. Denise Oakes although she sings fairly well and looks attractive, is not my idea of a female lead especially when teamed with an obviously shorter partner in Bert Johnson, who I found less impressive than the other alternating lead, Colin Douglas. Johnson needs to project himself greater on stage, and I found his singing rather bland, Douglas the more adept of the two in putting across a song and the essence of the Jimmy Cliff like character.

Andrene Bonner played the mother, Miss Inez, with sensitivity and feeling, but seemed a trifle young to be Douglas' senior. This part was obviously written for Louise Bennet along similar lines as was, for example, the mother in Trevor Rhone's Music Boy (1971) and Barashnikov's 'O' (1976), and clearly illustrates the bankruptcy of Pantomime script ideas.

It was good to see Ranny Williams again in the type of role which we have become accustomed to having him play. Marse Ran, one of the finest local actors we may ever see, was at his usual best. When one considers his age, it is indeed a tribute to his talent that the inevitable physical defects of advanced maturity seem practically eliminated from his performance.

The dancing, despite the choreography of NDTCC principal dancer, Jackie Guy, seemed rather tame except for a few movements including an exquisite duet to the singing of Princess' There Was A Time. The chorus was equally disappointing, the men far outclassing the

women who looked either fat or dowdy. Emphasis on diction, especially in singing, has lapsed since the first dress rehearsal. What a pity one must resort to having microphones conveniently placed on stage to convey both song and speech, although I'm sure there are those who will see this as a progression rather than the opposite.

Peter Ashbourne's music was adequate with a few good numbers like There Was A Time, Child Of Sunlight (the best) and One Man, Two Face. The small orchestra was competent although sometimes too loud (or was that the electronically controlled sound?) Larry Sfradeed's sets are still a bit cumbersome and awkward though extremely attractive and effective.

All told, a clever and amusing farce despite the handicaps. AK



MR. NUFFUS ENTERTAINS: Mr. Nuffus is trying as hard to impress the cultured Mrs. Dry-up and her son Freddie simply to get his daughter

### TODAY'S TELEVISION

JBC TV	6.30 APL
9.00 Sign on - Faith for Today	7.00 Farmer's Daughter: "Exit Kathy" 7.30 News/Weather/Commentary
3.50 JAMAL	8.00 Upstairs Downstairs: "A Change Of Scene"
4.00 Sunday Matinee "Generation" David Janussen, Kim Darby	9.00 Sunday Night Movie: "Nelson Affair" Glenda Jackson, Peter Finch
5.40 Churchill's People "The Wilderness Of Roses"	10.00 Late Headline News
6.00 Headline News	10.02 Sunday Night Movie: "Nelson Affair (Contd.) Sign Off"
6.02 Churchill's People "The Wilderness Of Roses" (Contd.)	

### RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

JBC RADIO 1	RJR-AM
11.00 a.m. Sunday Promenade	9.30 a.m. Sunday Sports Diary
12.30 p.m. Ujamaa	11.45 a.m. Children's Bible Club
3.30 p.m. Into The Light	7.30 p.m. Back To The Bible
JBC RADIO 2	RJR-FM
12.00 noon. Classics	9.15 a.m. International Money Programme
4.30 p.m. On Stage	12.40 p.m. L.T. Concert
6.30 p.m. Reflections	6.30 p.m. BBC Theatre