

Houston Ballet presents fine version of 'Giselle'

By DIANE D. DIPIERO
Collegian Arts Writer

It's very hard to take a ballet such as *Giselle* seriously. A young village girl, Giselle, falls in love with someone whom she believes to be a young peasant man. Actually, he is a count, engaged to a lady of royalty. When Giselle learns about this, she kills herself. But before she actually expires, she dances around — sometimes with great strength, and at other times, doubled over in pain.

If that weren't awkward enough, Giselle joins a group of jilted girls who have ended their lives, the Wilis. Their mission is to seek revenge on their lovers by dancing them to death. Giselle reluctantly begins to weaken the count through dancing, but sunrise sends her back to her grave.

A good ballet company must carefully construct its presentation of *Giselle*, otherwise the lead characters can end up looking rather foolish. Fortunately, last Friday night in an Artists Series, Center for the Performing Arts presentation, *Giselle* was in the competent hands of the Houston Ballet. And while the company's rendition of *Giselle* might not have been the best, it certainly was enjoyable and well-crafted.

Ben Stevenson's beautiful artistic direction was enhanced by the high-caliber performance of the company. One standout was Rachel Jonell Beard, who played Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, with the power and seriousness it demanded. Beard was strong in facial expressions and body movement.

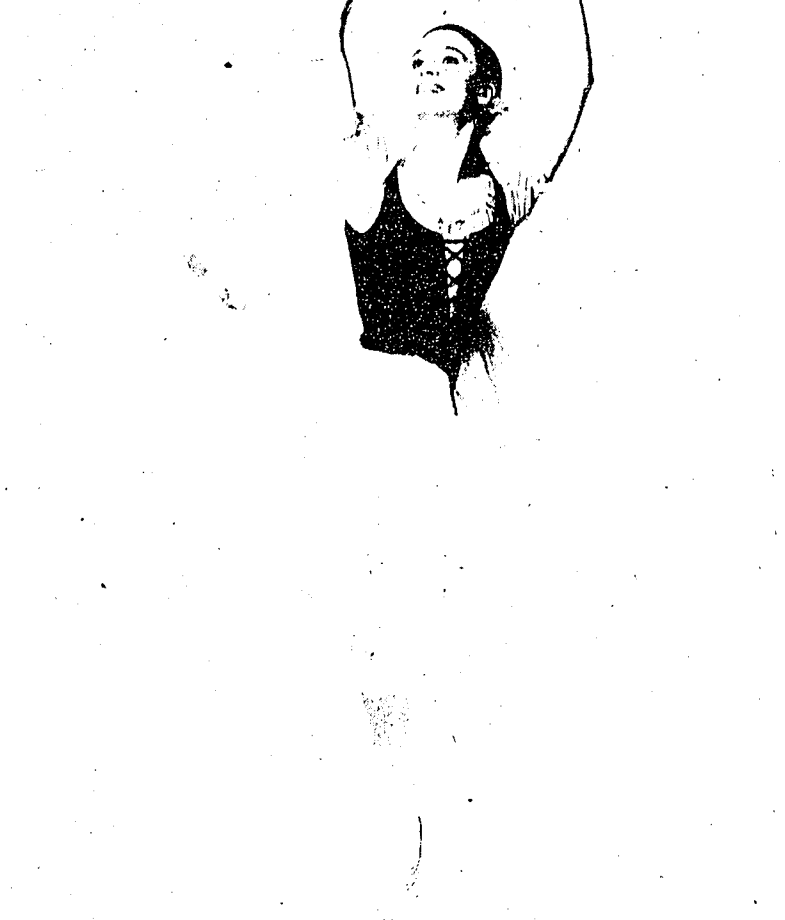
Giselle, played by Janie Parker,

and Count Albrecht, played by Kenneth McCombe, executed every step with grace. Parker also displayed good acting ability; she readily conveyed to the audience the joy she felt when she was with the count and the pain when she had when she left him. But her dancing is her higher attribute — she can make the simplest set of pirouettes look so dazzling. Each time that McCombe lifted Parker into the air, you could sense the audience members holding their breath. Yet, the couple made each step look easy and natural.

Behind these principal dancers was a group of finely tuned performers. Whether working in small groups or as a whole, the dancers moved in sync with one another. Unfortunately, one member of the Pas de Quatre had a couple of mistakes, which certainly inhibited her from dancing to her full potential. It is vital to remember, though, that a dancer should be entitled to one off night out of about 100 live performances.

Perhaps *Giselle* is not the best way for people to be introduced to the Houston Ballet. It is a difficult ballet to perform, because it requires as much dramatic concentration as it does dancing ability. Those who saw the company's presentation of *Swan Lake* last year will easily see the difference: *Swan Lake* did a much better job of revealing the Houston Ballet's precision and talent.

Yet, the show was a success. The ballet's orchestra sounded wonderful. Also, the village scenery and the spooky outdoor setting were very realistic. Peter Farnes's costumes complemented every aspect



Janie Parker's dancing lit up the Houston Ballet's Friday night performance of the classic romance *Giselle*. Although the dancing was superb in many places, the performance lacked the sparkle of past Houston Ballet efforts. The dancers, however, succeeded in making the contrived storyline feasible, while the scenery and costumes added to the total effect.

of the show. But, especially memorable is the conclusion of *Giselle*. As dawn breaks, the Wilis' power dies, and so *Giselle* must leave Count Albrecht and return — forever. As the count falls to his knees, *Giselle*

places white flowers in his hands and quickly flutters away. The count is left heartbroken. Any company whose performance brings tears to someone's eyes is definitely one of the best.

'Eco-Rockers' interweave folk music with a message about environment in HUB concert

By JILL S. KOSKO
Collegian Arts Writer

Stamping, slapping, strumming and humming, Bill Oliver and Glenn Waldeck performed in 301 HUB last Tuesday evening, charming the small but devoted audience with their lively songs.

concert review

Sponsored by Eco-Action, the duo played folk songs for nearly two hours, winning the audience from the start with their enthusiasm and energy. These guys aren't just any ordinary folk singers. Calling themselves "Eco-Rockers," they write and perform music with environmental themes.

Despite their critical message, the songs are generally upbeat and enjoyable. Even the bluesy pieces ("Shopping Maul") and the sentimental tributes to ecological heroes ("Song for William O. Douglas") never become somber enough to alienate the audience. "We want to present our message in a positive way and attack in a light-hearted manner," Waldeck said.

Lines such as "Please don't leave the water running when you wash the dishes" are typical of their songs' lightness and humor. Although the lyrics are consistently sarcastic, they never become bitter; instead, they are logical and sensible arguments for the preservation of our world. One song, for instance, asks us to think about "all the trees we read" and points out that it's silly to take a 30-year-old tree to make a one-day newspaper. Listening to those lines, you can't help feeling a little ashamed, thinking, "Yeah... it does seem silly."

More than their songs, the personalities of the two men made them a truly likeable pair. A big man from Austin, Texas with dark curly hair, Oliver had an attractive stage presence and a deep rich voice that was a pleasure to hear.

Almost the exact opposite in build, dress, voice and style, Waldeck provided an enjoyable contrast to Oliver. A Boulder, Colorado teeshirt and short pants clothed Waldeck's small frame while a jaunty cap and a comb over his straight blonde hair, Waldeck's exaggerated facial expressions reflected the feelings of the songs. As a former drummer for Monday, Monday, Waldeck improvised the "percussion" parts by stomping his workman boots and playing off any object in his path — from a stool to the back of his guitar. His voice, higher and sharper than Oliver's, was pleasant to hear in his two solo numbers but sounded much better harmonizing under his partner's bass.

Together, Oliver and Waldeck played their harmonicas and guitars and, occasionally, even their faces. Waldeck was especially good at "face-playing" and could make all sorts of fascinating popping, clicking and clucking noises to go along with the music. By their ability to imitate the sound of dropping water, both Oliver and Waldeck jokingly claimed the title of rain makers.

Immediately, the duo involved the audience by getting them to sing along with their first song, "Shopping Maul," a funny, sarcastic piece about the monstrosities that have become an institution of our time. "You've seen one, you've seen them all! They gotta zillion parking stalls! They make the downtown business crawl..."

Invitations to the service were posted at the Friars' Club, a show-business gathering place in Beverly Hills that Silvers started, a club spokesman said.

Silvers, who started in show business as a vaudeville singer at age 13, made his film debut in *Hit Parade of 1941*. He continued for the next decade to play comic roles in feature films, usually as the hero's friend.

His film credits in later years included such comedies as *It's a Mad Mad Mad World*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *The Strongest Man in the World*.

He won a Tony award in 1951 for his role in the Broadway play *Top Banana*, and another in 1952 for the stage version of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

But the bald, bespectacled comic was best known for his role as the rascally con man Sgt. Bilko in the hit program *The Phil Silvers Show*, originally called *You'll Never Get Rich*.

Phil Silvers:

Beloved comedian dies at 73

By GEORGE GARTIES and
JUDY SMAGULA FARAH
Associated Press Writers



Phil Silvers

LOS ANGELES — Milton Berle, Sid Caesar and Steve Allen were among the 100 mourners Sunday at a funeral service for Phil Silvers, "the one of a kind" comedian who made his mark as television's big-grinning schemer, Sgt. Ernie Bilko. Silvers, who portrayed the fast-talking, scheming Master Sgt. Ernie Bilko in the 1950s television series *The Phil Silvers Show*, died at his home Friday. He was 73.

Silvers died in his sleep at 1:30 p.m. of natural causes after going over some fan mail with his personal assistant, Jean Edwards, said his daughter, Tracy Silvers.

"He was totally professional," Allen said before the private service at Mount Sinai Memorial Park, 10 miles northwest of downtown. "He was one of a school of comedians who had a natural air of authority on stage. When he went on stage, he took charge and made people know they were seeing a professional."

"He was one of a kind. He was a great comedian," Caesar said.

Long time friend Berle delivered the eulogy. Others attending included Morny Amsterdam, Danny Thomas and Carl Reiner.

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The series ran from 1955 to 1959 and won three Emmy awards in 1955: Silvers was named best comedian and best actor in a continuing performance, and the show was named best comedy. The show won another Emmy in 1957 for best comedy series.

"As Bilko I was the world's worst con man," Silvers said in a 1977 interview. "But I never won out over a rookie. It was me against the Pentagon. That's what made the Bilko show hit."

Silvers entertained U.S. troops in the Mediterranean during World War II. His Broadway performances included parts in *High Button Shoes* from 1947 to 1950, *Top Banana* in 1951 and 1952, and *Do-Re-Mi* in 1960.

In addition to Tracy Silvers, survivors include daughters Nancy, Laury, twins Candy and Gaby, who appeared on the television series *Happy Days*, and a granddaughter, Jaclyn. He was married to former Miss America Jo Carroll Dennison from 1945 to 1950. His second marriage to Evelyn Patrick also ended in divorce.

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Inaudible vocals hurt show

By DEBBIE GOLINI
Collegian Arts Writer

If you were in the mood to mousse up your hair, wear splattered jeans and high-top sneakers and dance, the Valley of Kings concert held Thursday night in the HUB Ballroom was for you. However, if you want to listen to some music, you were most likely disappointed.

concert review

The Valley of Kings, a Connecticut-based rock band consisting of Gabriel Cohen on guitar and vocals, Ron Saffin on bass, and Kerry Miller on drums, performed free for roughly 100 people

Thursday night. Their show can best be described as fast, frenzied and loud. The group played songs from its recently released album *Victory Garden* in two sets, yet it was nearly impossible to hear or distinguish the words.

As I sat in the first row by the stage, I listened to Valley of Kings play one song after another. I can only tell you the titles of four songs, "Love Turns to Love," "Come Out Julie," "The Distance" and "Where Have You Gone," for out of the more than 20 songs they played (some more than once) those were the ones for which I could figure out the words. The guitars and drums had a way of drowning out Cohen's vocals. On a rare occasion, I was able to decipher a few phrases only to have the instruments come in full force. Cohen might as well have been lip-synching up there on the stage for all the audience could hear.

However, a few people in the crowd didn't seem to mind. When Cohen said, "This isn't

classical music, don't feel you have to sit there all stiffly," some took that as an invitation to go up to the stage and dance — and they did interesting dances. Two guys from the audience ran towards the stage, flung themselves to the floor, and proceeded to kick and pound their feet. Others chose more conventional methods of bouncing to the fast beat.

The Valley of Kings did perform danceable music. The tunes were upbeat, fast and had an appealing quality to them.

Musically, Valley of Kings played very well. All of its songs exhibited lively guitar and drum beats. Saffin, on bass, looked like he was having a good time laying down the rhythm, and Miller pounded out the back beat with as much enthusiasm. Perhaps if the musicians were less enthusiastic towards their instruments, the audience would have been treated to fine vocals as well.

Gate." Browne breaks down and bleeds all over the listener, while Taylor goes into all sorts of detail about what has happened to him without giving a clue as to how it makes him feel. The virtue in this is that it is more accessible, less difficult than Browne. He's always sounded good on the radio.

With middle age, he's opted outright for radio-style blandness. There isn't an original here, that really inspires shared feeling in the audience, unless someone out there is easily moved. Tensirec ditties like "Song For You Far Away" only manage to deaden the nerve ends of the serious music lover.

Taylor's musical craftsmanship is as much a mixed blessing as his vocal and lyrical habits. On the new album, both the title track and "Only One" are pretty much trademark originals. They're replete with a walking tempo, ringing instrumentation and orchestral accents. You can't listen to them without hearing "Shower the People" or "Up On The Roof." Sadly enough, while those songs were charming, these are lethargic.

His originals have always earned higher marks for their arrangements than they have for passion. Greater conviction has usually been evident in his treatment of covers. His versions of "You've Got a Friend" and "Up on the Roof," both penned by Carole King, were certainly the definitive ones. In his hands "Handy Man" was gentle and seductive.

No such feeling ensues when one hears this album's covers of "Everyday" and "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance." "Everyday" is so flat that — pardon the cliché — Buddy Holly must be turning over in his grave. There's no excuse for such a heavy-handed desecration of this effervescent song.

"The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" is both flat and gratuitous. It's easy to see the appeal of "Everyday" would have for an interpreter, but

wherein Westberg tells an ornery stewardess just where she stands in his eyes, the most worthwhile aspect of that record has — the song with charm, life and feeling — it would no doubt be "Going Round One More Time," a guileless reflection on romance that comes up in some of his best younger brother, Livingston.

That's why *I'm Here* demonstrates that Taylor is, once and for all, a misfit in the world of rock. He has never allowed himself to sit still stylistically, and here he indulges his fondness for pure Nashville country and western. Helping out are Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Anthony Crawford and an entire orchestra of strings. The album's theme — the romantic mythology of the fifties and his painful maturation would be the best way to describe it — is not original but there are several enchanting songs here.

"Mistis" is a mini-country operetta, carried aloft by strings, mandolin and banjo. If Phil Spector (producer of the Ronettes' "Be My Baby" and the Righteous Brothers' "You've Got That Lovin' Feeling") worked in Nashville instead of New York, this is the kind of song he'd create. "The Wayward Wind" sounds like something from Lionel Newman or Aaron Copeland. "Old Ways" and "My Boy" are similar in scope but no less emotionally loaded. In the former Young speaks as someone who has been disillusioned, and in the latter as someone who wants to save the next generation from disillusionment.

When he's good, Young can be as heart-breaking as — and more subtle than — Springsteen.

Young's voice is an acquired taste, and his duets with the strident Jennings don't enhance its appeal. And the mediocrity of the last two songs guesses this crew will be at home in no time. Great tracks: "Hold My Life" ("because I just might lose it"), "Let's Get the Dial," a deftly executed salute to underground bands every-

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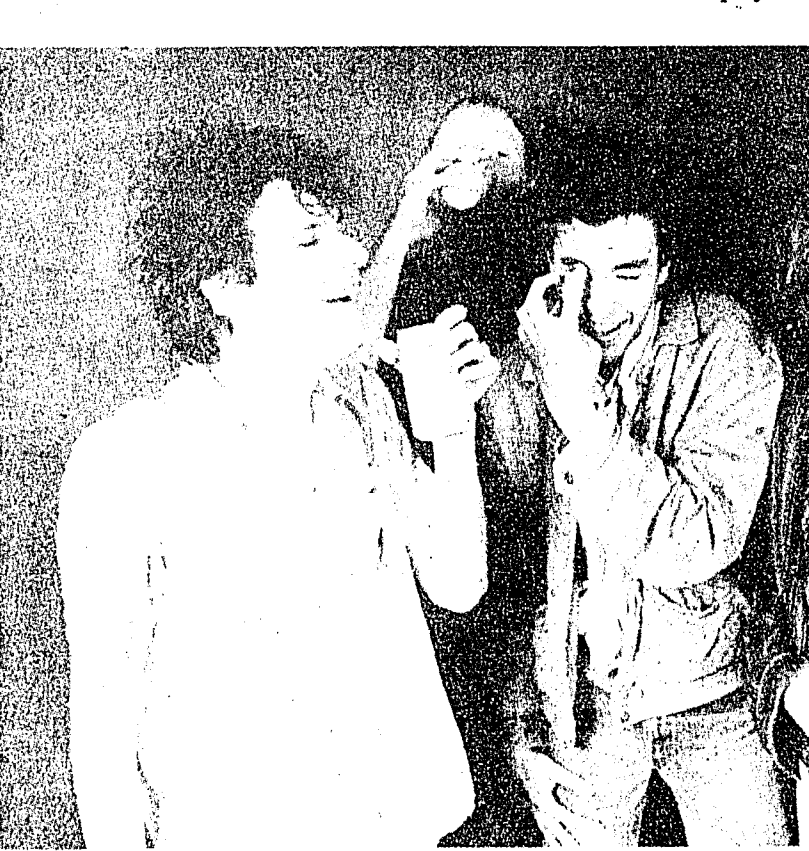
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You can bet that this is the way the Replacements celebrated the completion of their first major label album release. Because of the change, the band's latest album is more structured than earlier releases, yet "Westberg and company sound like 800 kinds of passion and tension looking for an exit." Left to right: vocalist Paul Westerberg, bassist Bob Slinson, drummer Chris Mars and guitarist Tommy Stinson.