



GAME—Tom Bower, as a pitcher who can't hack it, grits his teeth before hurling the ball

STAGE REVIEW

Fun Is Foremost in Two One-Acts

By SYLVIE DRAKE
Times Staff Writer

Jonathan Reynolds' two one-acts, "Rubbers" and "Yanks 3, Detroit 0, Top of the Seventh" have in common only the fact that they are comedies and usually billed together. Both have surfaced at the Backalley Theater in Van Nuys in a production by Allan Miller that smacks strongly of showcase.

"Rubbers" is a one-joke send-up of the political arena. "Yanks" verbalizes the crisis-of-conscience of a failing pitcher on the mound. Both offer countless opportunities for star turns (Reynolds has been an actor and knows how to write for actors), but neither play breaks free of the sketchiness imposed by the one-act limit.

Except for the fact that both run a bit longer than they should for their own good, however, there is considerable fun in each. "Yanks" has a built-in logistical problem that gives the impression the play develops in slow motion and we'll get to that in a minute. But "Rubbers," done with restraint and cohesion has hilarious potential.

It is a farce set in the New York State Assembly, but it might as well be the L.A. City Council Chamber any day of the week. The Great Debate is raging over a bill to legalize the open display for sale of contraceptives. Naturally, the bill was introduced by an assemblywoman and the holier-than-thou choir of indignation comes from the assemblymen who oppose it with the caterwauling of injured bulls.

"Rubbers" satirizes the obvious. The circus atmosphere in which self-serving and/or self-aggrandizing politicians thrive is a natural target that hardly needs inflating to be funny. But the 11 actors at the Backalley—and by association director Laura Zucker—are so intent on telling us and showing us *how* funny, that restraint flies out the window and cohesion falls apart.

With few exceptions, each actor seems determined to outshine the next, blowing the whole shot. The exceptions are Clarke Gordon as a godlike Speaker and Jessica Rains as the lone and sometimes drowned-out assemblywoman. For the rest, caricaturing is frequently so pronounced that it borders on smugness—a trap real-life politicians also have been known to fall into.

Footnote: The mail displayed by Mr. Tomato (James Hornbeck) is clearly blank and Ilene Kristen's Miss Sinkk may go own in history as the first court reporter who can do her job with one hand. Intentional exaggeration or oversight? Director Zucker doesn't make it clear—which is the problem when farce fails to take itself seriously.

"Yanks" is quite a different play, more mellow and more wry. Tom Bower is very convincing as 37-year-old "Duke" Bronkowski, the disgruntled pitcher who cogitates between lousy tosses about his crumbling life. With each succeeding home-run ball or wild pitch, the future looms grimmer. Gone is economic security, the wife, the razor blade commercials. As the afternoon wears on, he gets heckled by opposing players (Hornbeck, Roger Reid, Wil-

liam Utay, Gary Lee), lectured by the coach (John Anderson, too broad in a cartoon performance), razzed by 1 own teammates, fights with his catcher (nicely done by Robert Lesser) and is momentarily reprieved from financial humiliation by a sexual fantasy co-starring a luscious Ilene Kristen.

This production is better integrated than "Rubbers" but impeded by the artificiality of the situation. Reynolds' device of jumping from soliloquy to conversation to fantasy slows things down to a dreamy crawl. In addition, a good deal of the "Duke's" deliberation grows repetitive. Careful editing might improve matters and might be worth attempting.

At present, "Rubbers" and "Yanks 3, Detroit 0, Top of the Seventh" are recommended for people who like to see competent actors strut their stuff. But it has some distance to cover before it becomes theater where the good of the whole takes precedence over the splash of individual parts.

Performances at 15231 Burbank Blvd. in Van Nuys run Fridays through Sundays, 8 p.m. until May 6 (780-2240).