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Joffrey II's dancers a pleasure to watch

At the Ballet

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Members of the Joffrey II Ballet Company presented four traditional and contemporary ballets Thursday night, and all were well-done and a pleasure to watch.

Joffrey II is the training company for the Joffrey Ballet of New York, one of the country's best dance companies. The dancers are all younger and less experienced than those in the main company, but their dancing was first-rate and their performances were fresh, vigorous and energetic. Their turns were sharp, jumps crisp and leaps high; there was little to criticize in their technique.

The highlight of the evening was the premiere of "Trysts," which was created in 1987 at the Joffrey II choreographer's workshop. Choreography is by Diane Coburn Bruning, to music by Prokofiev. Bruning was backstage during the inaugural performance of her ballet; at its conclusion, she took a bow with the dancers.

"Trysts" is an emotional ballet, about relationships between men and women. It featured slow, fluid sections interspersed with light, quick passages.

The most memorable passages were the slow sections, which featured pairs of dancers whose bodies seemed almost entangled at

times.

One of the dancers in "Trysts" was Robert Conn, a Little Rock native, who also danced in the pas de deux from "Flower Festival at Genzano."

In both, Conn was very good: Precise and quick, with jumps made more impressive by his long legs. The pas de deux is a much more traditional dance, and a portion of the audience appeared to prefer the pas de deux and the final ballet of the evening, the grand pas from "Raymonda," another traditional piece.

The choreography of "Raymonda" is by Petipa, with staging by Jeremy Blanton, associate director of Joffrey II. The dancers all were good, and Adam Sklute, the male lead, was especially light on his feet.

The program opened with another contemporary ballet, "The Gardens of Boboli," choreographed by Mark Haim, to music by Albinoni. Sections of this dance were very traditional, others whimsical and quick and others slow and dramatic.

One of the most interesting passages was a section danced by three men. The three showed amazing strength and flexibility, as two passed the third man back and forth between them, held him high in the air and finally carried him off the stage.

Joffrey II was brought to Little Rock by Ballet Arkansas, whose artistic director, Richard Steinert, previously danced with the company.