

## Joffrey opens up 'Gardens' for L.A.

*Haim ballet  
inventive and  
uninspired*

By Gillian Rees

There must be something classical in the air this year. Six of the seven ballets introduced to the Joffrey Ballet repertoire during the company's spring and current L.A. seasons are set to classical music, the exception being Laura Dean's "Force Field" to music by Steve Reich.

Even the two young choreographers-of-the-moment, Mark Haim and Mark Morris, have chosen to hark in the baroque elegance of Tomaso Albinoni and C.P.E. Bach, respectively.

The Los Angeles premiere of Haim's "The Gardens of Boboli," set to six pieces by Albinoni, opened the Joffrey's mixed bill at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion Wednesday night and revealed Haim to be an erratic choreographer, by turns inventive and uninspired.

Haim has not attracted the adoration of the critics the way Morris has, but then his work hasn't been seen as much, either. Many of his ballets have been set on European companies (unidentified in the program notes), and this is his first for the Joffrey. The Joffrey II danced the world premiere of "The Gardens of Boboli" just two weeks ago in New York.

On Wednesday, the curtain opened to reveal Leslie Carothers and Tyler Walters standing facing each other. Penelope Curry's stark lighting was focused on them; the rest of the stage was bare and dim. Slowly Carothers took Walters' hand, as if inviting him to dance a minuet. She turned into him and then back to her original position. Again, she took his hand and developed the phrase a little further. Within a few brief phrases, Walters was supporting her in slow, super-extended back flips across the stage. It was as if the history of dance from courtly to athletic were condensed into two brief minutes.

"The Gardens of Boboli" is a study in this juxtaposition between the baroque and the contemporary, but the opening pas de deux was by far the most successful and original of the six sections. Much of the rest was repetitive and uneven and often reflected the music with literal, metronome precision.

One could make a good guess at Haim's favorite choreographers, however: George Balanchine and Paul Taylor, with a dash of Eliot Feld.

The subtle but jazzy hip movements and quick direction changes echoed Balanchine; the beautifully held and bent-leg jumps for the men, the rush of bodies on and off the stage were Tayloresque; and the quirkiness of some of the positions, such as catlike arches on all fours, or lying on the floor with chin cupped in hands, was reminiscent of Feld. Inspired though he may be

Joffrey/B-5

Parrish Maynard, front, is an inspired technician who can smile through the most difficult passages, as he did Wednesday in the L.A. premiere of Mark Haim's "The Gardens of Boboli."



# Joffrey

Continued from page B-1

by these masters, Haim has yet to find a cohesive style of his own.

Stunning for the quality of the performance more than the originality of the choreography was Parrish Maynard's brightly energetic solo toward the end. Maynard is an exceptional technician who can grin with obvious enjoyment during the most difficult feats, and he strutted on stage with buoyant confidence before launching into a series of dazzling leaps. He is definitely a dancer to watch.

On the uninspired side of "Gardens" was an adagio section for

---

*The quality and eagerness of Joffrey's dancing has improved immeasurably these last two seasons and proves the brilliance of opening night was no accident.*

---

Carothers and four women and the tasteless, ultra-athletic trio for Maynard, Peter Narbutas and Roger Plaut in which concern for the health of the dancers' overstretched ligaments overcame any thought of the value of the choreography.

Sally Ann Parsons' costumes — pretty but unmemorable — were comprised of untards for the men and short tunics for the women in various shades of teal and purple.

The rest of the program showed the Joffrey dancers to be in excel-

lent form. The quality and eagerness of their dancing has improved immeasurably these last two seasons and proves that the breathless brilliance of their opening night as the Music Center resident company four years ago was no accident.

Gerald Arpino's romantic "Birthday Variations," to music by Giuseppe Verdi, featured a magnificently smooth Glenn Edgerton as the cavalier, with Cameron Basden, Victoria Pasquale, Jodie Gates, Tina LeBlanc and Dawn Caccamo as his colorful ladies. Gates and LeBlanc especially shone in their solos — Arpino knows these dancers so well, he gives them movements that highlight their individual talents and allow them to celebrate movement, not just execute it.

As sleek and ethereal as "Birthday Variations" is boldly romantic, Arpino's "Round of Angels" featured the superb, long-limbed Carothers partnered by Ashley Wheeler.

Paul Taylor's "Cloven Kingdom" closed the program, and the technical surety and endurance of the four ape-like men in their white tie and tails evoked a well-deserving round of applause.

The Joffrey season continues through Sept. 27.

---

*Gillian Rees frequently reviews dance for the Herald.*