

# 1,000 Applaud Rousing Show

By Lella Katsayen Telberg

One thousand spectators filled the auditorium of Riverhead High School on Saturday evening to give the Joffrey II dancers a rousing welcome. Under the dual sponsorship of the East End Arts Council and Suffolk Community College Association this group of young ballet dancers, aged 16 to 22, won the hearts of the audience with their youthful vigor, professional stage decorum and a display of an exacting and brilliant technique.

The program of four dances was obviously selected to portray the range and diversity of this 16-member company. And although one would have wished more sophisticated content, it is also hoped that future companies will bring greater complexity and more profound artistic statements to an audience quite eager to lend its support to professional dance theater. As budding young artists, each of these talented performers is expected to enter the major Joffrey Ballet Company or a similar group of international repute as their artistic matures.

"The Gardens of Boboli," choreographed by the young Mark Helm in 1966 (to the music of Tomasso Albinoni) was a fitting choice for the opening dance. Divided into six sections, the dance served to introduce the various members of the company to the audience, as individuals, in small groups. Cynthia Giannini and Adam Skilne performed the initial dance—a typical male/female duet—which was a strong, searching statement of the interdependence (and isolation) inherent in this format. Mr. Helm's contemporary approach to a formal ballet structure enabled the dancers to bring a sense of drama and urgency to the surface. As in the later five sections, this is ballet with a "modern" openness; sweeping use of the arms as a counterpoint to the footwork, exceptional torso displacement, unusual body shapes and free use of the unlimited space. Although the whole evening's performance was done "on point" one saw the influence of current dance modes as a stimulating impulse in the choreographer's hands. Both soloists executed the dance with technical brilliance and assured bravura.

Ms. Giannini was also the soloist in another section of this suite of dances in which she became the "gold woman out" in a group of five women dancers. As the quartet performed the entire dance in unison, the soloist, attempting to remain a part of the corps, became more and more disoriented as her upper torso found new

ways of expressing novel and discordant phrases while her footwork remained consistent with the group's phrasing; an interesting display of a "disident's" struggle for survival. Ms. Giannini danced with expressive verve and dynamic intensity.

The six male dancers of the company, all exceptionally brilliant technically, were given choice solo and group parts to perform. And, as partners to the ladies they danced with the assurance and grace one expects of a mature artist even though the choreography was wisely scaled to their individual skills; e.g., lifts were sparse and solidly prepared, since young male dancers need to build strength gradually before executing the difficult overhead lifts one takes for granted in professional companies.

Joseph Schnell performed a solo of remarkable technical diversity: aerial lightness, quick footwork, centered turns (triple) and a perky confidence demonstrated the type of training these young dancers are pursuing toward their personal goals. Another sectional dance was a male trio in which Mr. Schnell was manipulated and supported in a series of slow-motion gymnastic feats by Robert Conn and Shane Gregory. Although the changing body forms were visually intriguing (in la Pliobots) the sequences never portrayed the humor, drama or artistic ingenuity necessary to transform the physical act into a dance expression.

Two group dances of perpetual motion based on a spacious sense of movement completed this Albinoni work. Lisette Salgado led the ensemble in a series of continuously progressive lyrical sequences in a romantic genre; and the finale, performed by a group of nine constantly moving dancers, created a frenetic energy that swept across the stage in a river of exits and entrances. Obviously relishing this hectic pace, the dancers sped through space, ignoring the occasional soloists doing foucete turns, jumps en l'air, etc. The audience dartings, unexpected directional changes and multi-layered actions were reminiscent of Paul Taylor's choreography—a sparkling influence of gracious proportions.

In direct contrast to the first dance, was the last—a traditional ballet dance in the classic vein: the "Grand Pas: Raymond's." Created in 1898 by the great Marius Petipa for the Maryinsky Russian Ballet, this is a selection of dances from Act III of the full-length ballet. The five couples, led by Mary Barton and Alexander Sukonnik, executed a series of variations on Hungarian folk

dances wearing the colorful red velvet/gold braided tunics of the period. The courtly elegance of these "couple" dances is patently an ostentatious show piece for this young company, which presented a glowing performance of this ageless classic to an appreciative audience.

The two remaining dances were quite different and sought to bring another dimension to the program. "One in Five," a duet for four males and a female soloist (Johanna Snyder) was probably advised as a lighthearted, humorous element. It purported to be a circus group in the process of rehearsing. With much grunting, posturing and exaggerated facial expressions, the livesome engaged in a somewhat nebulous sequence of unrelated actions, which could have been quite comical with more regard to timing, pacing and purposefulness. Unfortunately, to lack of clarity left me and a good part of the audience somewhat puzzled as to the objective of this dance, though an "A for Effort" was certainly in order.

"Diary," a duet of love and dreams, more appropriate in feeling for this young troupe, completed the program. Marlene Kendall and Brent Phillips, clad in stark black unliners, portrayed the longing evoked by the popular songs of Judith Lander. Choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett, the dance was a sequence of solos in which each person danced in isolation. This was followed by a tender duet of dramatic and visual originality which allowed the relationship to flow into a quite beautiful unity. A rather disturbing element was the obvious "lip-sync" mouthed by Ms. Kendall in the beginning—an unnecessary distraction to an eloquent dance.

The many people who worked to bring this excellent young company to the East End should be congratulated on their efforts, as the full house and demonstrative audience so clearly evidenced.



Two dancers from the Joffrey II troupe dance a scene from "The Gardens of Boboli" one of the selections on last Saturday's program in Riverhead. —Herb Migdoll

# Young Dancers Dazzle House at School