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Joffrey II dance troupe displays youthful charm

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DANCE REVIEW

A youthful exuberance and the gift of imaginative choreography provide the Joffrey II Dancers with the ability to charm an audience with a dance program that is bright and pleasing.

The group offered two programs Saturday and yesterday at the Carpenter Center for the Performing Arts before audiences of about 1,000 and 800 people, respectively. Saturday's presentations were "The Gardens of Boboli," the pas de deux from "Flower Festival at Genzano," "Trysts" and selections from "Raymonda." Yesterday, the performance was "Beauty and the Beast."

"The Gardens of Boboli" is a showcase for the dancers. Choreography by Mark Haim combines a fluidity of movement with quick, athletic maneuvers. The dancers posture, they leap about and, in a superb example of control and strength by three dancers — Kyle Ahmed, Phillip Gardner and Shane Gregory — they form beautiful patterns as two manipulate the third into positions that often defy gravity.

Equally appealing was a solo by Adam Skulte, who stands out not only by his technical interpretations but also with a stage presence that commands attention. Tracey Sartorio was also notable.

Jennifer Mattingly and Robert Conn were a charming pair in the romantic pas de deux from "Flower Festival at Genzano." August Bournonville's choreography, here staged by Toni Lander, is stylized after the period and offers each dancer moments of bravura.

"Trysts" is an imaginative work by Diane Coburn Bruning that has the dancers moving exuberantly. Cathy Lee Cawley's costumes, of warm earth tones and blues, and V. L. Wilson's subdued lighting, enhance this ballet which tends to be somewhat repetitious and lengthy.

Closing with selections from "Raymonda" was a showcase selection. Here, Jeremy Blanton has staged the Petipa choreography to use the best talents of the group. Their youthfulness creates the vitality needed for this work, but that same youthfulness works against them because they lack the maturity to evoke the needed arrogance and fire.

For yesterday's matinee audience that was predominantly children, the group offered the classic love story "Beauty and the Beast." Unfortunately, something is lacking in Richard Englund's staging of this ever-popular fable.

Perhaps it is the subdued lighting, which casts a mood of depression. The major flaw may be that there is no real action or excitement in the story as it unfolds. Robert Conn is a magnificent beast but has little to do until Act III, when he emotes over the plight of his appearance and his unrequited love for Beauty.

A hint of magic comes when the Beast is transformed with a puff of smoke into his alter ego, the handsome Prince, here danced by Skulte. He and Lisette Slagado, as Beauty, then have a very moving duet as they find joy in their love for each other. This is the high point of the ballet, both musically and choreographically.

Granted, there were some rough moments in a delightful evening of dance, but the joy the dancers obviously felt in performing made up for those miscues.