

Youth plays grown-up in Joffrey II concert

There was at least one rather sobering lesson to be learned from the Joffrey II Dancers' concert last night at Vanderbilt University's Langford Auditorium:

Namely, that, when politely requested to act like mature persons, a stageful of young dancers will, whenever possible, respond by behaving like grown-ups.

Indeed, throughout last night's concert—which netted the Vanderbilt "Great Performances" series its first packed house of the season—it became more than a little clear that, while requiring that their youthful charges make honest-to-gosh art, the Joffrey II's directors have also taught them a great deal about what it means to be an artist.

To observe a striking young ballerina such as Meg Gurin, as she transformed herself into a totally convincing operetta temptress during the *Raymonda* Czardas, was to gain hope for the very future of classical dance. To see a dancer such as the Ivory-smooth Brent Phillips, in complete and cool-headed control of the mannerist contortions required of him by James Kudelka's *Passage*, was to be assured that we were observing at least some sort of intellect at work.

But, even more importantly, to watch the Joffrey II's full corps having an all-out romp of it in Mark Halm's extravagant *Gardens of Boboli* was to see dance once again become a happy, and perhaps even a healthy, art form.

Undeniably, last night's program sometimes found the troupe in rather dangerously deep water. While Mary Barton and Alexander Sukonnik could boast the requisite quickness for Bourbonville's *Flower Festival pas de deux*, they could not somehow manage to let it skim lightly across the stage floor.

What's more, except for Gurin's commanding sultriness, the *Raymonda pas de dix* remained only an exuberant outline sketch of its actual grandiose self.

But the Joffrey II's strict-disciplinarian directors, Richard Englund and Jeremy Blanton, have clearly elected, at every opportunity, to demand too much rather than too little from their troupe. Never once in last night's program was there a hint of the sort of drivel which normally crops up in the typical farm-team repertory.

Admittedly. Kudelka's *Passage*

John Bridges

REVIEW

less energy.

If a flowing dance for five women occasionally worked itself into something of a clutter, Adam Sklute, a very big boy, made the most of the tiny little shot-putting, discus-tossing solo allotted him before the work's finale.

An arduously acrobatic trio found Phillips jackknifed, scissored and cantlevered about with effortless, and somehow elegant, ease. ■