

# Joffrey II company poised, mature in classics, new works

By Susan F. Hunter

Special to *The Journal-Constitution*

The Joffrey II Dancers delivered a knock-out of a performance at Agnes Scott College in Decatur Thursday. The program included two exceptional contemporary ballets and two classics.

The 16 members of Joffrey II, who range in age from 16 to 22, are being groomed for a career in the parent Joffrey Ballet. Even this chamber-sized ensemble was cramped in Gaines Auditorium, but the dancers handled the small stage with poise and maturity.

Richard Englund, Joffrey II artistic director, has a knack for choosing repertoires that complement young dancers. "The Gardens

## Dance Review

of Boboli," choreographed by newcomer Mark Haim, manages to be lighthearted without being lightweight.

In the opening movement, the most tender of the six sections, Adam Sklute turns Meg Gurin over and over in exquisite slow-motion cartwheels. In the next movement, Johanna Snyder leads the ensemble in a bit of perky footwork.

Then, two athletic men (Robert Conn and Shane Gregory) partner the equally strapping Joseph Schnell in a gymnastic series of lifts and balances in the next movement. As

a dance for two men and a woman, this is old hat, but as a dance for three big men, it is compelling and oddly touching.

Later, Sklute is utterly captivating as he turns a street-wise strut into a happy-go-lucky romp. Gurin and the ensemble return, but their soft arm movements develop a tension, and they seem to fling something down. If the first dances are those of innocence and youthful exuberance, perhaps the final section hints at impending adulthood.

The soaring, ethereal music of Thomas Tallis' choral score sets the tone for James Kudelka's otherworldly "Passage." Brent Phillips dances fleeting solos with a succession of partners — male and female

— who seem to represent different aspects of his passage through life.

Cynthia Giannini and Alexander Sukonnik delivered an accurate rendition of Bournonville's difficult and romantic "Flower Festival of Genzano." Miss Giannini was a charming peasant girl, and as her swain Sukonnik danced with impressive style, although perhaps somewhat tentatively.

The company was elegant in the Grand Pas from "Raymonda," a suite of Hungarian folk and courtly dances. But in comparison to the brilliance of both contemporary ballets, the classical pieces seemed slightly reserved and perhaps a shade academic.