

Rockwell Hall

Joffrey II Melds Old, New in Fine Fashion

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News Contributing Reviewer

The Joffrey II Dancers may not be the original Joffrey Ballet, but to an appreciative full-house audience, it didn't matter a bit.

Opening the premiere season of the QRS Dance series Sunday afternoon in Rockwell Hall at Buffalo State College, the Joffrey II Dancers, in typical Joffrey fashion, proved adept at a variety of ballet-based styles.

Joffrey II lays claim to a bright, youthful ensemble that is evolving — a perfect example of how old traditions meet the new. The company is firmly balletic in its use of traditional patterns and steps, yet its style, depending on the dance performed, also contains elements of neo-classicism and postmodern techniques. Who else but from the Joffrey can one see such dazzling variety?

The program at Rockwell Hall featured something for everyone. In "The Gardens of Boboli," choreographed by Mark Haim, classical style revealed itself in unmannered clarity and effortlessness that never

looked rushed. The seven sections of the ballet revealed eclectic styles and patterns of movement — from a pas de deux to a unusual pas de trois for three boys. Tracey Sartorio and Adam Sklute, in section one, prove themselves to be masters of perilous partnering. This romantic pas de deux, with many difficult lifts, features unusual aspects of choreography — backward hand-springs, for example, become penchees.

The third section resembled early Pilobolus dances, as three male bodies meshed, coiled, and encircled each other. Legs are split; handstands are suspended; bodies move along the floor. The performers accepted the risk of not looking like ballet dancers and came out pulled together and stretched to new capacities.

Not entirely successful was the "Pas de Deux From Flower Festival at Genzano." This traditional, romantic dance by Bournonville, performed by Marlene Kandall and Robert Conn, had moments of the necessary lightness demanded by the choreography, but on the whole,

was mechanical. Kandall was unsteady and a bit sloppy in her quick beats; Conn was rather stiff.

"Visitations" and "Grand Pas: Raymonda" were both stunning examples of what the Joffrey II Dancers are capable of. "Visitations," choreographed by Matthew J. Wright to the music of Dvorak, is a soft, lyrical dance — waltz-like in some sections; large and expansive in others. The four girls — Lissette Salgado, Tracey Sartorio, Jennifer Mattingly and Amanda Smith — are excellent, showing off classical technique to perfection. Apparition-like, they appear as light as air, as they form a moving backdrop. Shane Gregory's abstract section is also compelling. While the girls bourree in place, he stands on his head, then moves quickly across the floor. Interesting.

I have seen the "Grand Pas: Raymonda" performed many times, but I have never seen it performed in such a spirit of youthful freshness. Lissette Salgado was outstanding, both from a technical and a dramatic standpoint. Salgado's every movement was filled with ex-

pression; her leg extensions and arabesques were equal to her clean, precise jumps and beats. Most appealing was her coquettishness which never demeaned the integrity of the traditional Petipa choreography.

Also well performed was the variation by the four boys. Bright and quick, they moved with necessary uniformity, precisely landing from each fast jump and turn.

In fact, the entire Joffrey II ensemble proved its mastery of classicism, leaving the audience breathless.

Next on the QRS Dance series is the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company for one performance 8 p.m. Feb. 21 in Rockwell Hall.

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