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## La Danserie Audience Research Report

February 28, 2011

Prepared by Robert Abrams, Ph.D.

This report describes the results of an audience research survey conducted immediately after La Danserie's February 11, 2011 performance of *Carte Blanche*. The survey was distributed on paper during the show and audience members were encouraged to complete it and return it before they left the theatre. The survey included a combination of questions asking for reactions to the show as well as demographic questions, all of which fit on two letter size pages.

There were 47 audience members who completed the survey. There were approximately 150 people in the audience, so the response rate to the survey was approximately 31%, which is a good response rate for a medium length, voluntary survey for which no completion incentives were provided.

ExploreDance.com, a project of Robert Abrams Consulting LLC, also reviewed the show. This review is included at the end of this report to provide a detailed sense of the show to which the audience responded in the survey.

### Executive Summary

By combining the audience's ratings of aspects of the performance with their responses to open ended questions, it is clear that the strengths of La Danserie's show were first and foremost in the choreography and dancers' performances. La Danserie should strive to maintain the high levels of these aspects. The main weaknesses were primarily in the technical aspects of the show, such as the lighting and music. An investment in improved technical presentation will likely have a positive impact on audience satisfaction.

Even with the technical problems, 83.0% of the audience said they would recommend La Danserie to a friend, and 84.8% of the audience felt they were provided very good value or good value for the money they spent on their tickets.

Several interesting trends relating to the audience's demographics were revealed that could be considered by La Danserie as it develops future shows, and the marketing for those shows.

## Audience Rating of the Artistic Elements of the Show

On average, the audience gave the following number of stars (from 0 to 5) to each aspect of the performance.

Aspect of Performance	Average Number of Stars	% who gave 3 or fewer stars	% who gave 2 or fewer stars	N (Number of people who responded to each question)
Choreography	4.3	10.6%	2.1%	47
Dancers' Performances	4.3	6.4%	4.3%	47
Costumes	4.0	23.9%	8.7%	46
Lighting	3.7	30.4%	15.2%	46
Sets	3.5	43.2%	13.5%	37
Music	3.7	39.1%	17.4%	46
Printed Programs	4.4	12.8%	0.0%	47
Overall Impression	4.1	17.0%	6.4%	47

The above table presents three ways of looking at the performance ratings. The average number of stars gives a sense of how well the audience as a whole responded to each aspect of the performance. The next column looks at the percentage of respondents who gave three or fewer stars. This gives a picture of the portion of the audience who thought the performance was average or poor. The following column looks at the percentage of respondents who gave two or fewer stars. This gives a picture of the portion of the audience who thought the performance was poor.

Art should strive to please the audience, but pleasing the audience is not art's only goal. For instance, some art is intentionally difficult. Also, not all art is going to be to all people's tastes. There are two ways to approach the interpretation of these numbers. First, one might have a goal of having all aspects of a performance do equally well. If this were the case, one might look at aspects that were rated lower relative to other aspects, and then think about how they could be improved in the future. It could also be a way to decide where to focus new artistic challenges. Second, it is a potential worry if large portions of the audience thought an aspect was poor (looking at the data in an absolute rather than a relative sense). There may be nothing that can be done about it (for instance, better sets may be too expensive), or it may be a matter of not being able to please everyone all the time (for instance, musical preferences are very varied and fragmented), but I would pick a threshold of concern and then reflect on those aspects (and possibly dig deeper to understand why people responded the way they did). If there are large percentages of the audience in the middle, a small investment in that aspect might push them into the superior ratings next time. On the flip side, I would also look for areas where there was little cause for concern (and high marks), and then strive to make sure those aspects (such as choreography and dancers' performances) maintain those high levels.

The Sets aspect is also interesting because ten audience members skipped the question. Of these, seven thought it was not applicable, and three skipped the question

completely. Depending on how one interprets this, it might mean that sets were fine, just not important to this type of dance performance, which would mean the results for Sets are "really" higher than they appear, but this is somewhat speculative.

It should also be noted, as will become apparent in the discussion of the open ended questions on the survey, that some aspects of the performance, such as lighting and music, have both artistic and technical elements. The survey was intended to measure the artistic component of these aspects, but based on the open ended responses some audience members may have been responding to the technical component.

### **Audience Assessment of the Value of the Show**

When asked "Would you recommend La Danserie to a friend?" (N = 47), 83.0% said Yes, 14.9% said Maybe and 2.1% (1 person) said No. This says, very clearly, that the audience La Danserie is attracting is both pleased with La Danserie's art, and is willing to help spread the word.

The audience was asked, "How much value did this La Danserie performance provide for the money you spent on your ticket?" The mean response was between Very good value and Good value (N = 46). Almost a majority (47.8%) felt they were provided Very good value, 37.0% felt they received Good value and 15.2% felt they received Some value. No one felt they received No value, although one person did skip the question. These results are positive. They also are consistent with the patterns of response to earlier questions (for instance, about the same percentage felt they received Some value as gave the lighting, sets and music 2 or fewer stars). This consistency provides further evidence that the reason those audience members felt they received Some value, rather than Very good or Good value, was due to the quality of the sets, lighting and music, but it should be remembered that this is a correlation, not direct evidence of causation.

### **Demographics**

#### *The Audience's Prior Expertise in Dance*

The audience was asked, "Prior to attending this performance, what was your level of expertise in dance?" (N=45) On average, the audience felt they were just below Intermediate. The distribution is relatively even. This is good for La Danserie because it means that the company has an opportunity to grow the dance community, but it is also a challenge because it means La Danserie's art has to continue to appeal to people with differing expectations. It is also good from a methodological perspective for this survey since it means that beginner dance fans did not shy away from answering the survey.

Level of Expertise	Percentage
None	11.1%
Novice	26.7%
Intermediate	37.8%
Expert	24.4%

### *The Audience's Roles in Dance*

When looking at the dance role numbers, two results stand out. First, there was a relatively high percentage of dance students. Of these 11 dance students, 8 students (72.7%) said they would recommend La Danserie to a friend, with the remaining 3 saying Maybe. This high percentage of dance students willing to recommend La Danserie to a friend suggests that La Danserie would be successful in efforts to increase its audience size by promoting the company to dance students, and also by asking those dance students to promote the company. Second, there were relatively low percentages of audience members who play "active" roles in dance, such as being a concert dancer. It might be worthwhile for La Danserie to reach out to other dance companies to encourage their dancers to attend La Danserie performances (and to encourage La Danserie dancers to attend other companies' shows as well). Perhaps a program of reciprocal ticket discounts could be arranged for professional dancers in the Greater Los Angeles area.

Roles in Dance	Percentage (out of 42 who checked at least one role)
Dance fan	52.38%
Dancer - concert dance	4.76%
Dancer - social dance	4.76%
Dancer - competitive dance	2.38%
Professional critic or writer	0.00%
Casual writer or blogger	2.38%
Choreographer	7.14%
Musician or DJ	4.76%
Dance teacher	4.76%
Dance student	26.19%
None of the above	14.29%
Other	16.67%

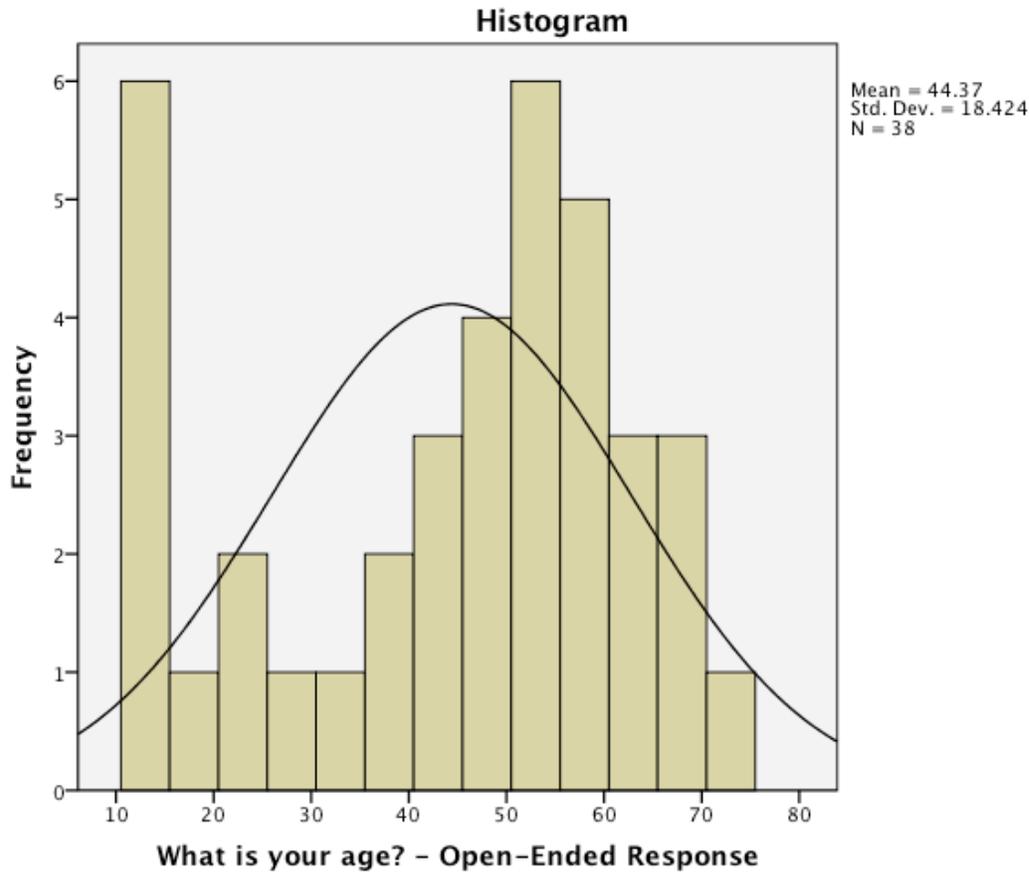
In the Other category, four respondents indicated they were a parent of a dancer, two were former dancers, one was a producer and one was a member of a dance company Board.

### *Age of the Audience*

The mean age of the audience was 44.4 years old. The youngest audience member was 13 and the oldest was 72 years old.

The histogram of the audience's reported ages (shown below) suggests that the audience was skewed towards people 50 years of age and older, except for the group of teenagers who also fall outside of a normal distribution. This suggests that La Danserie might do well to reach out to potential audience members aged 25 to 45. I would look at communication channels this age group tends to use, and I would also identify existing La Danserie supporters in this age group, and ask them to recommend La Danserie to their friends. This, of course, would be in addition to building on existing successes with older and younger audience members.

An alternate way to view the age distribution is to say that there is a normal distribution centered around age 55 or so, with a tail at 35 and younger. Either way, the data suggests there is a gap in the younger age group that should be bolstered in the interests of La Danserie's long term audience development. This gap might be related to La Danserie's product or outreach, but it also could be due to stage of life issues, such as the need to pay for babysitters for small children. If the latter is indeed the case, short child-friendly performances could be a solution for some La Danserie supporters.



*Education Levels of the Audience*

The largest group of respondents had a college degree (N = 40).

Highest level of education completed	Percentage
Attended HS	10.0%
HS degree	2.5%
Some college	17.5%
College degree	35.0%
Masters degree	20.0%
Doctorate	15.0%

### *Gender of the Audience*

Of the 43 respondents who answered the question, "What is your gender?", 69.8% were female and 30.2% were male.

### *Marital Status of the Audience*

Of the respondents (N = 39), 66.7% were married and 33.3% were single.

### *Income Levels of the Audience*

Reported income distribution was as follows (N = 31).

Annual income	Percentage
Less than \$30K	9.7%
\$30K to \$39K	9.7%
\$40K to \$49K	3.2%
\$50K to \$59K	6.5%
\$60K to \$99K	9.7%
\$100K +	61.3%

This income distribution suggests that La Danserie might want to adjust prices by offering a combination of discounts and premium options. The high percentage of audience members with high incomes should also be attractive to potential advertisers.

Among the 27 respondents who provided both age and income, all but one in the \$100K+ group were 46 years old or older. It is possible that lower incomes inhibit some younger potential audience members from purchasing tickets, although income is not the only limiting factor facing younger audience members.

### **Analysis by sub-groups**

Sub-group differences were examined by gender, prior dance expertise and age using Univariate Analyses of Variance. Traditionally, a difference is considered statistically significant if the significance is 0.05 or smaller. A significance level of 0.05 means that there is a 5% probability that the differences are due to chance. The level of significance one will accept is always a judgment call: if the consequences of taking an action based on the data (and getting it wrong) are high, then one would want stronger significance (lower numbers), but if the consequences of taking an action are small, weaker significance can be acceptable. Results that come close to traditional rules of thumb for significance can be used to establish hypotheses for future studies with larger samples.

In the case of this La Danserie survey data, when the data is sub-divided, the sub-group Ns become fairly small. Therefore, the sub-group trends should be mostly taken as suggestive: not major concerns, but if the trends align with other observations they provide some additional impetus for action.

### *Value Provided*

On average, males reported being provided higher value (2.62 on a scale of 0 to 3, where 0 = No value and 3 = Very good value) than females (2.24), but these differences are not statistically significant (Sig. = 0.106, N = 42). Nonetheless, given that there is often, or is often assumed, to be a trend in dance favoring females, this might be a result worth investigating further, such as by asking male supporters of La Danserie why they felt they received good value.

Audience members with no prior dance expertise reported receiving less value than those with more dance expertise, but the differences are small, and are not statistically significant (Sig. = 0.288, N = 44). (None = 1.80, Novice = 2.33, Intermediate = 2.50, Expert = 2.18; or in other words, those with no dance expertise reported slightly less than Good value, compared to those with more expertise who reported slightly more than Good value.) When comparing those with no dance expertise to all others grouped together, the significance is 0.110 (None = 1.80, Novice to Expert = 2.36). The significances are different because different groups, with different means, are being compared. Nonetheless, it does suggest that an investment in programs for people without prior dance expertise might pay off in long term supporter retention. With an 11.0% probability of this result being due to chance, and it being common sense that those without prior expertise could use support, implementing such a program for beginners would represent a modest risk.

An analysis of value provided crossed with age of audience produced no clear trend and no statistical significance (Sig. = 0.272, N = 37). Audience members 50 years old and older were provided slightly higher value (2.53) than those 19 years old and younger (2.29), who were provided slightly higher value than those 20 to 49 years old (2.09). This does, though, parallel the apparent gap in the age distribution of the audience.

### *Recommending La Danserie to a Friend*

In terms of recommending La Danserie to a friend, there were no statistically significant differences by gender, prior dance expertise or age.

### *Overall Impression of the Show*

In terms of overall impression of the show, there were no statistically significant differences for gender, prior dance expertise or age. The most suggestive result obtained was for prior dance expertise. Audience members with no prior dance expertise gave the show 3.6 stars overall, compared to 4.4 stars for novices, 4.3 stars for intermediates and 3.7 stars for experts in dance (Sig. = 0.227, N = 45). Comparing None to all others results in a significance of 0.242 (None = 3.6 stars, All others = 4.18 stars). Comparing Expert to all others results in a significance of 0.156 ("All beginners" = 4.2 stars, Expert = 3.7 stars). This result follows the same general pattern as that for value provided crossed with prior dance expertise. It is possible that experts in dance might have been more affected by the technical problems of the show (although cross-tabs of expertise in dance crossed with ratings of lighting and music do not show any obvious evidence of such). In any case, it makes sense that experts in dance would be more demanding in their rating of the show. Pleasing everyone is a challenge, yet this show did well overall.

## Analysis of qualitative questions

The responses to the open ended questions ("What did you like about this La Danserie performance?", "How could La Danserie improve their performances in the future?", and "If you have any other comments or suggestions, please tell us here.") are consistent with the star ratings: the audience commented positively on the choreography and the dancers (nine comments), but commented negatively about technical issues such as sound and lights (12 comments). This strongly suggests that La Danserie should investigate what might have gone wrong with the technical portion of the show and try to fix any issues for the future. La Danserie should also maintain the good work with regards to choreography and dancers' performances.

Four audience members specifically commented approvingly of the variety of dance and music in the show.

A few representative comments:

*Choreography and Dancers' performances (What did you like?)*

"original, engaging, cutting edge choreography"

"good solid technique (classical) based performances"

"Some really good choreography, fabulous dancing"

"Individual creativity developed in each piece"

"The variety and the different concepts of the choreographers."

"Everything was just beautiful!"

*Technical issues (What could be improved?)*

"Better lighting and less technical diff."

"sound quality @ venue"

"Need better advertising. Also, better crew."

"Shorten time between dances. Music too loud. Coordinate lighting."

"improve music / sound / lighting"

"stage management, volume of music was too loud"

"More tech rehearsal."

"get better lighting!"

*Other comments and suggestions for improvements*

"Really enjoyed the group from Idyllwild and the group that had to repeat their performance" (which means that while there were plenty of complaints about the technical problems, some in the audience were not bothered by these problems)

"I loved all the dances and the stories behind them."

"Play more evenings"

"What a pity more people don't see this terrific show."

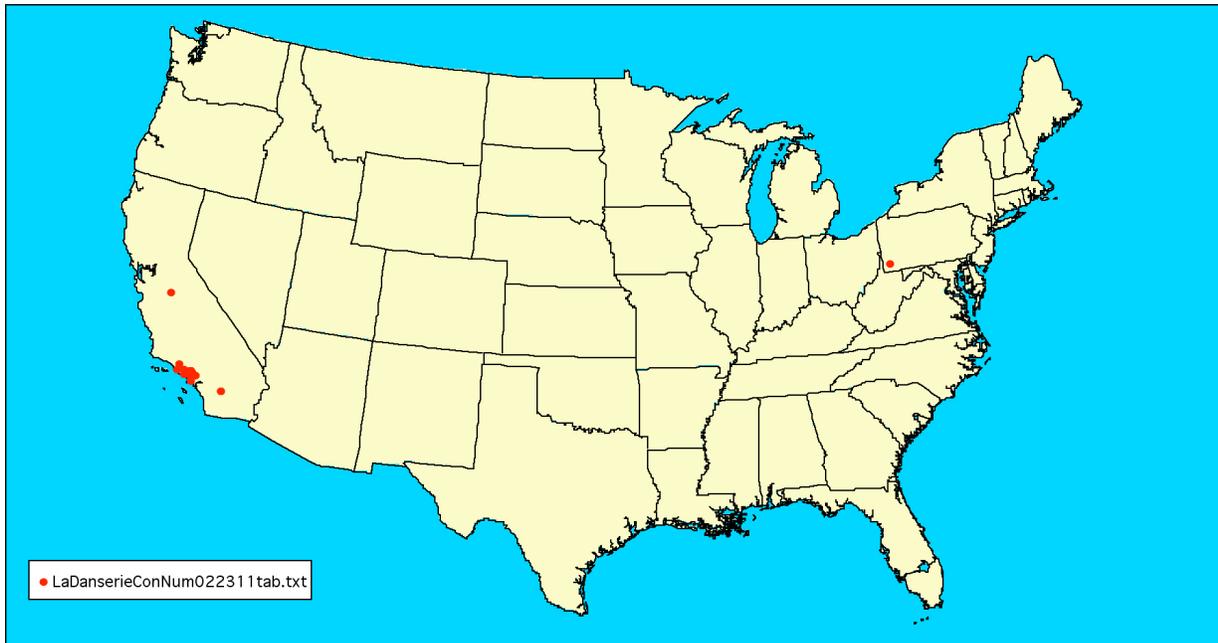
"Loved it! Wish more people would come!!"

"Keep up the innovative work!"

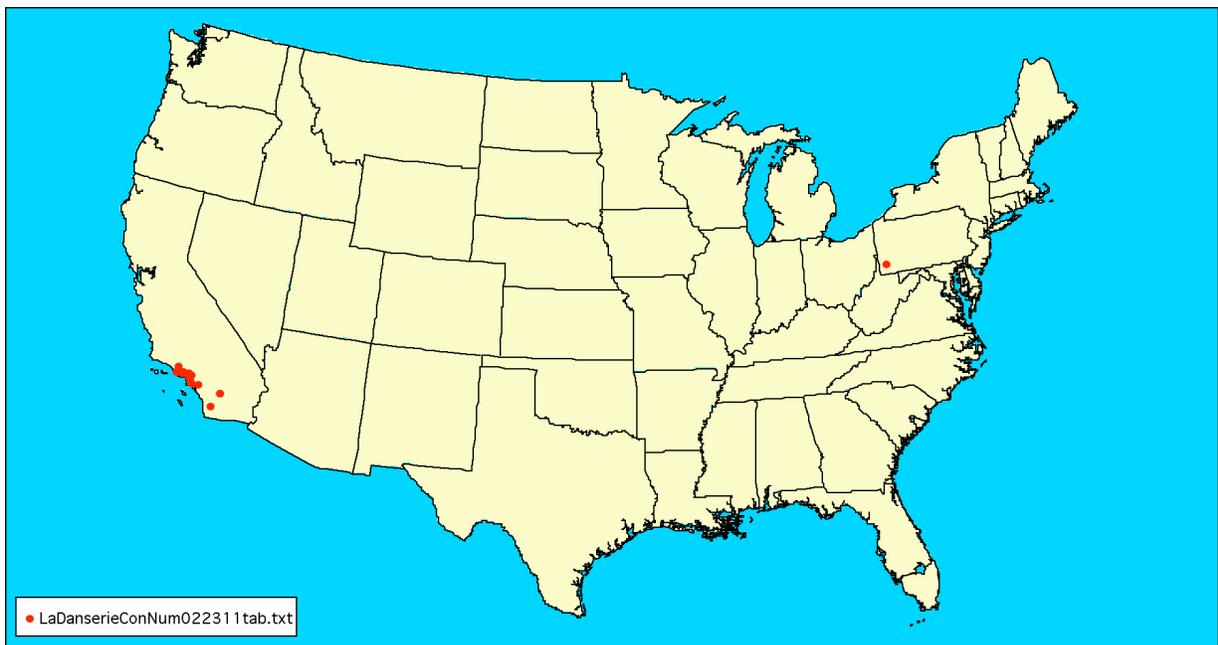
"keep up the great work!"

## Analysis of ZIP code data

Thirty six respondents provided their home zip codes. Twenty two respondents provided their work zip codes. The figures below show national and Greater Los Angeles area distributions (red dots for national maps and shaded areas for Greater LA maps). The distributions suggest that La Danserie is primarily attracting a local Greater Los Angeles area audience. As might be expected in the Greater Los Angeles area, the audience is spread widely in the region.



National distribution of survey respondents by home ZIP code



National distribution of survey respondents by work ZIP code



Greater Los Angeles area, displayed by 5 digit ZIP code regions, Work ZIP codes

## **ExploreDance.com review of La Danserie's Carte Blanche**

Review by Joanne Zimble

February 11, 2011

(<http://www.exploredance.com/article.htm?id=3071>)

La Danserie's presentation of "Carte Blanche" on Friday night gave its dancers the unconditional authority to wow and amaze in its pared down, back-to-basics performance, prioritizing movement and simplicity over complex themes and dynamic sets. After thirteen years in Los Angeles, the company continues to build on its reputation and secure a place as one of LA's finest dance companies. Friday night's show revealed the company's continuing innovation in ballet, incorporating contemporary themes as well as nurturing local talent. And in addition to sampling works by company regulars, we were also treated to the young talent of two youth academies - Maple Leaf Ballet and The Idyllwild Arts Academy.

Affiliated with La Danserie as a dancer and choreographer, Nicole Mathis offered a debut piece entitled "Sirenum Scopuli" which highlighted strong pointe work and fluid movements as three sirens interacted with female mariner Tatiana A'Virmond. Four gifted dancers, moving classically to the music of Phillip Glass, prepared us for the subsequent pleasure and delight inspired by the energy and technique of the company's talented dancers.

"Synchronic" was a triumph for The Idyllwild Academy of Arts as two pas de deux were performed simultaneously. In nude color tights and unitards the pairs moved elementally, eschewing exuberant lifts for tender, yearning, liting port de bras. An evocative flute sonata by Bach accompanied the dancers, collaborating in promoting a nostalgia for the innocence of young love.

"All that Glitters" starkly illustrated La Danserie's easy marriage of modern and ballet. Bursts of modern dance erupted from balletic movements as fluttering hands transitioned into arabesques; pique turns yielded to unexpected hip and shoulder undulations; pirouettes lead to skipping, creating a surprisingly robust lyrical tableau.

A spirited production commenced next with big noise and big energy while an assemblage of young dancers flooded the stage. Maple Youth Ballet gleefully pranced and frolicked, all on pointe, to the rhythm of George Gershwin. In sweeping grand jetes, dancers bounded on and off stage as the music crescendoed and abruptly stopped. Giggles and whispering filled the auditorium as the audience sat bewildered by the darkness and empty stage. Moments later, our anxiety was allayed as the dancers returned, beginning again, not the least demoralized - except this time, the music stopped again and the dancers did not return, but did reappear again to complete the performance after the next dance "Mouvance."

On the background screen behind the dancers in "Mouvance," two juxtaposed images of a baby and a woman looked out at us. Four dancers in ballet shoes romped playfully as the music quieted at times and the sounds of people laughing and talking on the recording could be heard. With hair down, smiling faces and bodies clad in nightie type costumes, a sweet domestic sensibility exuded from the cavorting bodies as the dancers tumbled, integrating cartwheels and somersaults into the exultant piece.

Artistic director Patrick Frantz's ushered us back from intermission with another piece showcasing the young talent from the Idyllwild Arts Academy. "Whimsies" explored the "interaction between the dancers and the choreographer and the bond of creativity that links them." In the bona fide classical piece the girls testified to the complexity of the unique relationship between choreographer and dancer as well as teacher and student as we witnessed the burgeoning ballerinas exhibit their prowess manifesting the vision of a veteran dancer.

A controversial white skirt, an elusive boy, and a melancholic mood opened "sight unseen." Judy Pizarro-Grant has created a compelling meditation on the fractured nature of women's relationships with one another as external pressures bear down. We watched as the dancers took turns wearing the skirt and the tension between them increased, all while revealing the object's divisive power. As the sartorially bereft girls moved in synch with one another, the one in possession of the skirt would move separately until finally the cause of the competition was abandoned and wrenching movements gave way to a spirited celebration of the accord among the now unified women. Once in alliance, the revelry began as they leaped joyously in a blended performance of balletic and modern movements, relieved of the alienating skirt.

After an examination of the rifts that often estrange women from one another, "Complexity of Love" examined the vagaries of romantic relationships. From Rei Aoo's Dance planet, two lovers' undulating bodies lunged and recoiled, reflecting the push pull nature typical of a fledgling relationship. From ecstatic allegric movements to poignant, desperate modern entreaties for attention, Angelina Dezaki climbed on and pleaded with Junji Dezaki (her real life husband?) to notice her. After his initial rejection, the two finally came together as love flourished in a tender pas de deux followed by two vanishing silhouettes disappearing upstage.

Avarice and aggression animated the dancers of "Reach, Angle, and Flow". In quick sharp movements, men in suits, and one similarly donned woman moved angrily, while defiant women on pointe turned and kicked in punctuated movements. The dance, with its suits, green background, frenzied movements, and fast paced music suggested a cutthroat climate with Type A workers - on Wall Street perhaps - turning on each other in a commentary on the greed resulting from of the lack of humanity that often coexists with capitalism. The gift of the dancers for embodying such characters had a chilling effect, creating a palpably unsettling mood. Fortunately, humanity prevailed as a male dancer finally realized his humanity and submitted to a woman's tender embrace.

La Danserie has once again reaffirmed its place in Los Angeles' artistic landscape and with its unwavering commitment to the arts, the company continues to prove to be an important force in the cultivation of young talent while providing a home for the city's artistic elite.