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MAGAZINE**

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Edinburgh International Festival

Director: Brian McMaster CBE

The 49th Edinburgh International Festival
13th August - 2nd September 1995

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Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

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Thanks to the public bodies, public and private companies,
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Edinburgh International Festival to take place

Music by Dvořák in the 1995 Festival:

The Jacobin

Monday 14 and Wednesday 16 August 7.15pm
Edinburgh Festival Theatre
Performance on 14 August sponsored by TSB Bank Scotland plc

Gypsy Songs op. 55

Tuesday 15 August 11am
The Queen's Hall
Sponsored by Bank of Scotland

Stabat Mater

Tuesday 15 August 8.00pm Usher Hall

String Quartets in D minor, E flat and F

Friday 18 August 11.00am The Queen's Hall
Sponsored by Bank of Scotland

Three Overtures (Nature, Life and Love), Biblical Songs, Symphony No. 6

Friday 18 August 7.30pm Usher Hall
Sponsored by IBM

Terzetto, Piano Trio in F minor, Piano Quintet in A op. 81

Saturday 19 August 11.00am The Queen's Hall
Sponsored by Bank of Scotland

Requiem

Saturday 19 August 7.30pm Usher Hall
Sponsored by Den Danske Bank

Symphony No. 8 in G

Sunday 20 August 8.00pm Usher Hall

String Quartets in A flat and G

Monday 21 August 11.00am The Queen's Hall
Sponsored by Bank of Scotland

Concertos for Piano, Violin and Cello

Monday 21 August 8.00pm Usher Hall
Sponsored by NEC Semiconductors (UK) Ltd

Symphony No. 7 in D minor

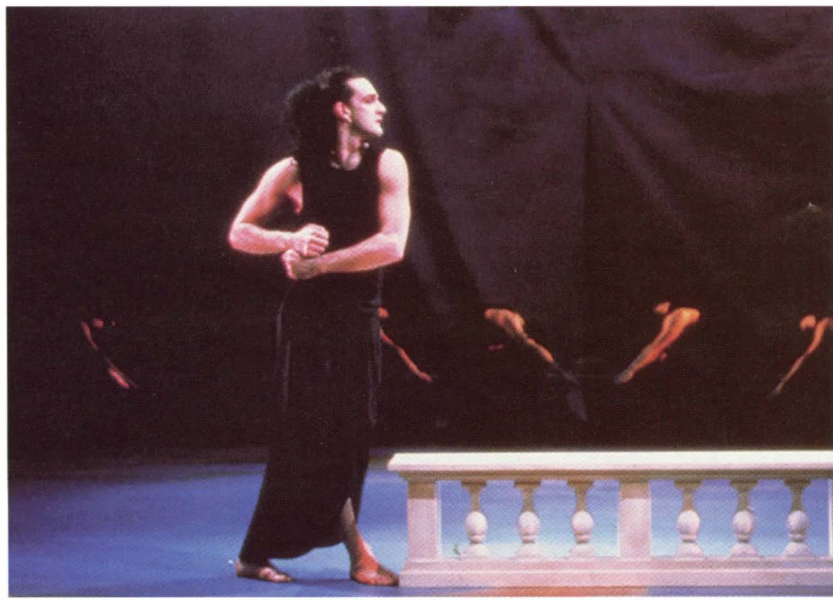
Tuesday 22 August 8.00pm Usher Hall

String Sextet in A

Thursday 24 August 11.00am The Queen's Hall
Sponsored by Bank of Scotland

Serenade in D minor op. 44

Wednesday 30 August 11.00am The Queen's Hall
Sponsored by Bank of Scotland



MORRIS DANCING

**Mark Morris admits to having ‘a wonderful love affair’
with Edinburgh and its Festival; Rupert Christiansen discovers
why the feeling is entirely mutual**

Above:
Mark Morris as Dido in *Dido and Aeneas*
Photo: D Pierre



As roundly sensuous and fleshy as his great precursor and compatriot Isadora Duncan, Mark Morris defies all our conventional notions of a dancer. He is neither lean, nor hungry, nor breathless. He smokes hard, swigs beer from the bottle and looks a flamboyant mess. The men and women who perform alongside him in the Mark Morris Dance Group further confuse the picture, not least because physically they are so different from each other. No rows of black leotards and white tights here, no suppression of individuality in the name of uniformity. Tall and short, plump and skinny, Aryan, Hispanic, Asiatic – all find their place side by side in Morris's great melting pot. His choreography bears no trace of the sloppy old hippy, however. At the root of Morris's aesthetic is a sense of form and harmony, a feeling for the evolution of pattern and relationship which reminds one of some master gardener balancing the claims of nature and nurture, the wild and the tamed. As his biographer Joan Acocella puts it 'in his work almost nothing occurs *alone* ... no sooner does something happen on stage than you remember its having flitted through five minutes before; then it recurs five minutes later.' Another central characteristic of Morris's work is its fidelity to the music: he shares with the greatest choreographers – Petipa, Ashton, Balanchine – the capacity to make the dance look like the inevitable visual transcription of the score, the movement rolling from the sound like silk unfurling. Of all dance modernists, Mark Morris is the supreme classicist. Since 1992 Edinburgh has taken the exhilarating joy of this loud, funny, irrepressible man to heart.

He has appeared in four consecutive Festivals and this year brings *The Hard Nut*, his typically zany yet entirely loving recreation of *The Nutcracker*, to the Festival Theatre, as well as a programme of four smaller-scale works to the King's. Festival Director Brian McMaster speaks of 'a special relationship' with Morris; less guardedly, Morris talks of 'a wonderful love affair' with the event, the city and its audiences. The embrace spreads beyond the cultured few: in 1993, following a fire at the Playhouse, the Group performed at the Meadowbank gymnasium and in 1994 it lit up sceptical schoolchildren in the Lothian region with a fun, fast and furious education programme. Without fuss or fanfare, Mark Morris has taken modern dance out of the ghetto and made it *communicate* again.

He was born in Seattle in 1956. That place and date are significant: so much of his dance seems imbued with the spirit of the West Coast and the soul of someone who grew up in the '60s, with its generosity, optimism and openness towards life. Morris can be deeply serious, even blackly intense, but he is never earnest or cynical. Emotion flows through his work. He is not afraid of beauty and he is not embarrassed by anything. In contrast to the deconstructed angst peddled by many of his contemporaries, he is all sweetness and light. In

other respects, he is immensely sophisticated and complex. An eclectic training in classical ballet, hula-hula, flamenco and Balkan folk dance, combined with a fascination for oriental theatre and low-grade American television culture, allows him to draw on a remarkable range of styles, traditions and allusions. His selection of music exemplifies this eclecticism: Hopi chants and ragas, Schoenberg, Michelle Shocked, Purcell, Brahms, Handel and his 'god' Bach have all inspired him. His personal temperament reflects this: he suffers from what one friend described as 'a car crash of personalities' – 'part diva, part truck-driver', as someone else put it. He is gay, and doesn't care who knows or what they think. He can be 'Mr Big Mouth', as he cheerfully admits (*Rolling Stone* headlined a profile 'Mark Morris says he's just a hard-drinking, chain-smoking, long-haired beast from modern-dance hell'). He can also be 'corny, folksy and sentimental', a loner whose idea of a great evening is 'to stay at home staring out of the window'. The Mr Big Mouth side of things has regularly landed him in trouble. He is not diplomatic, and enjoys checking anything or anybody pompos, be they royalty or the sacred cows of modern dance. 'All you have to do is not wash your hair for a week, act depressed, and you've got it' he quipped recently about one better-left-nameless trendsetter.



The Hard Nut Photo: Catherine Ashmore

The group which forms the core of his work has been developed over the last 15 years or so, first on the West Coast of the US, then in New York. Between 1988 and 1991 it was resident at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, where superb working conditions and steady financing allowed Morris to create some of his largest-scale works, including *Dido and Aeneas* (Edinburgh, 1992), *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso e il Moderato* (Edinburgh, 1994) and *The Hard Nut* (a spectacular production which cost close to £400,000). But the starchy Belgian bourgeoisie didn't altogether see the point of Morris's iconoclastic sense of humour – something Edinburgh seems to have no problem with – and the Group is happier based back in New York, where Morris, much to his amusement, has become a great figure among the fashionable intelligentsia. 'My life could be ten times more glamorous if I wanted it to be,' he says. 'I could spend every evening schmoozing with supermodels, I could jet around the world making a zillion bucks a minute as a freelance choreographer. But I don't want to. You see, I like what I do now; I like my company, I like making up dances for them. I guess I like dance too much to sell it short.' This integrity is held without piety or self-righteousness: if anything, it is evidence of what Joan Acocella describes as Morris's 'immense confidence in

himself'. He doesn't need to pretend and he doesn't want to fake it. As he approaches 40 and his career as a dancer inevitably begins to slow down, he has reached a sort of maturity. 'Mark is less crazy than he was' comments Acocella, and he himself feels that his choreography has reached a new level of 'simplicity'. Certainly his command of the geometry of dancers on a stage is now consummate, as one of his newer works, the austere *Grand Duo*, shown on the Group's English tour earlier this year, stunningly revealed.

Yet Morris is nothing if not multi-faceted, and his greatest delight lies in springing surprises on his audiences – as *The Hard Nut* will prove. Maturity and simplicity have not, fortunately, brought any diminution of his powers of invention and he shows no desire or tendency to repeat himself: currently he is bracing himself against the challenge of choreographing two 'danced operas', Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Purcell's *King Arthur*, which will lead him further down the road he began to travel with his version of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. After that, who knows? Mark Morris is unstoppable and unboxable. Edinburgh may think that by now it knows a bit about him – but genius like his is always several steps ahead, just wait and see.

Mark Morris Dance Group Mixed Programme

Monday 14 – Wednesday 16 August 8.00pm

King's Theatre

Sponsored by ScottishPower

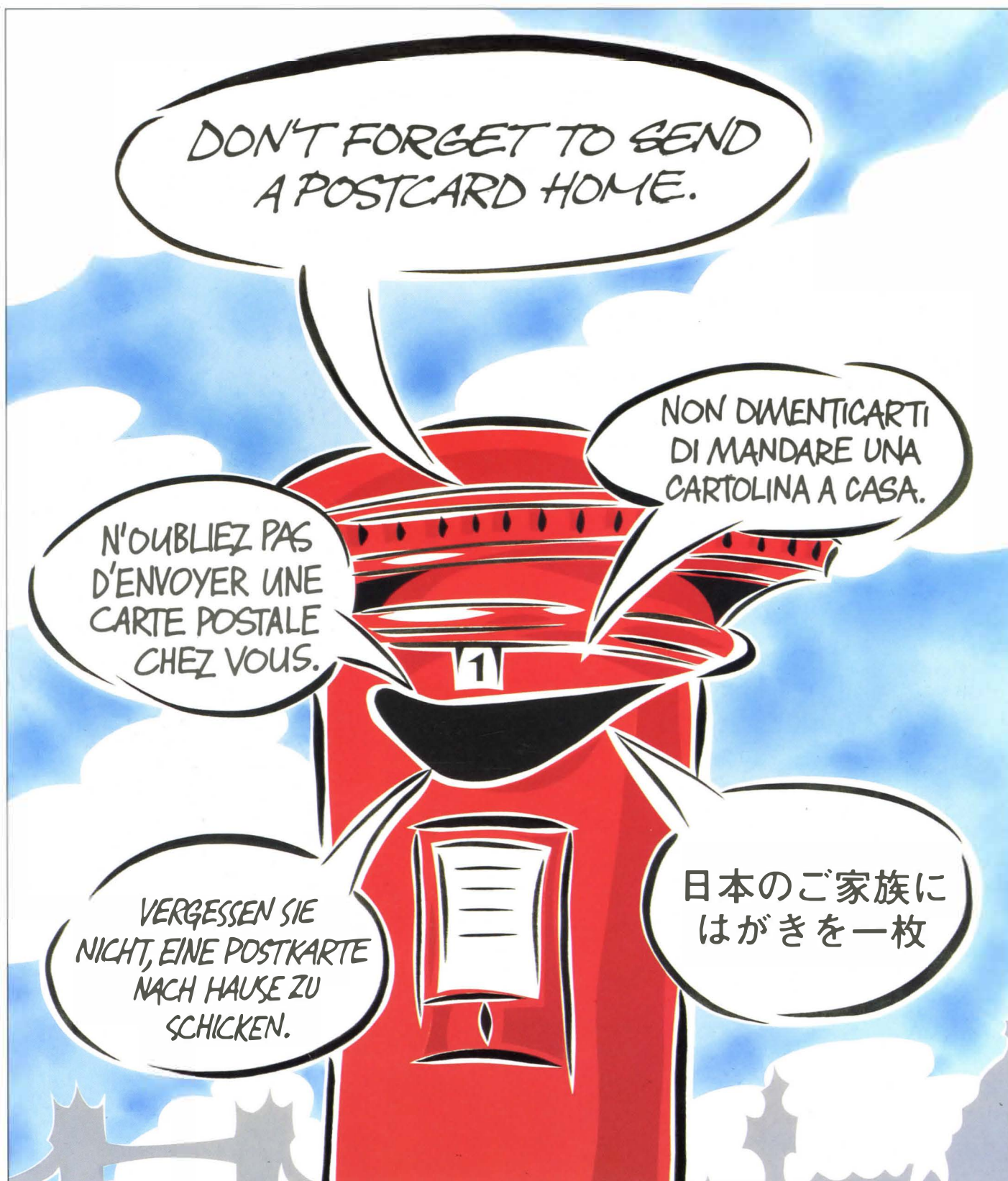
The Hard Nut

Tuesday 29 August – Saturday 2 September 7.30pm

Saturday 2 September 2.30pm

Festival Theatre

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