

# PERFORMING ARTS



Society for the Performing Arts

NOVEMBER 1987

# PERFORMING ARTS

The Theatre & Music Magazine for Texas & California

November 1987 / Vol. 5, No. 11

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— Houston Edition —

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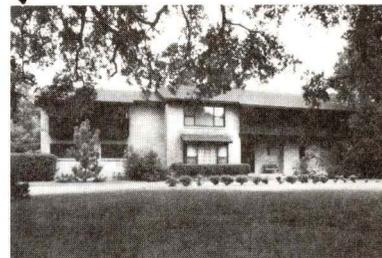
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PERFORMING ARTS magazine is published monthly by Performing Arts Network, Inc. to serve musical and theatrical attractions in Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Orange County. In Houston PERFORMING ARTS incorporates the official programs of the Alley Theatre, Houston Ballet, Houston Grand Opera Society for the Performing Arts, and Theatre Under the Stars. All rights reserved. ©1987 by Performing Arts Network, Inc. Reproduction from these magazines without written permission is prohibited. Subscriptions are \$30 per year. PERFORMING ARTS, Houston edition — 2472 Bolsover, Suite 279, Houston, TX 77005, telephone (713) 524-3883. PERFORMING ARTS, Los Angeles edition (and Network headquarters) — 2999 Overland Avenue, Suite 201, Los Angeles, CA 90064, telephone (213) 839-8000; PERFORMING ARTS, San Francisco edition — Opera Plaza, 601 Van Ness Avenue, Suite 2052, San Francisco, CA 94102, telephone (415) 673-3370; PERFORMING ARTS, San Diego edition — DCA Media, Inc., 3680 Fifth Avenue, San Diego, CA 92103, telephone (619) 297-6430; Regional Sales Offices: 19 West 12th Street, New York, NY 10011, telephone (212) 242-1940; Regional Representatives: Warden Kelley, Allen & Opler, Inc., 2 North Riverside Plaza, Chicago, IL 60606, telephone (312) 236-2757; Flavin/Kelly Associates (Detroit), 2655 S. Woodward, Suite 175, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48013, telephone (313) 335-5050.

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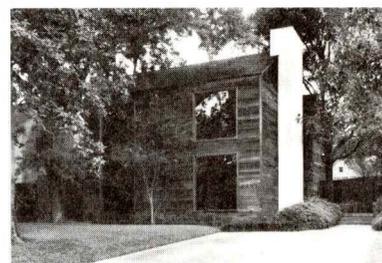
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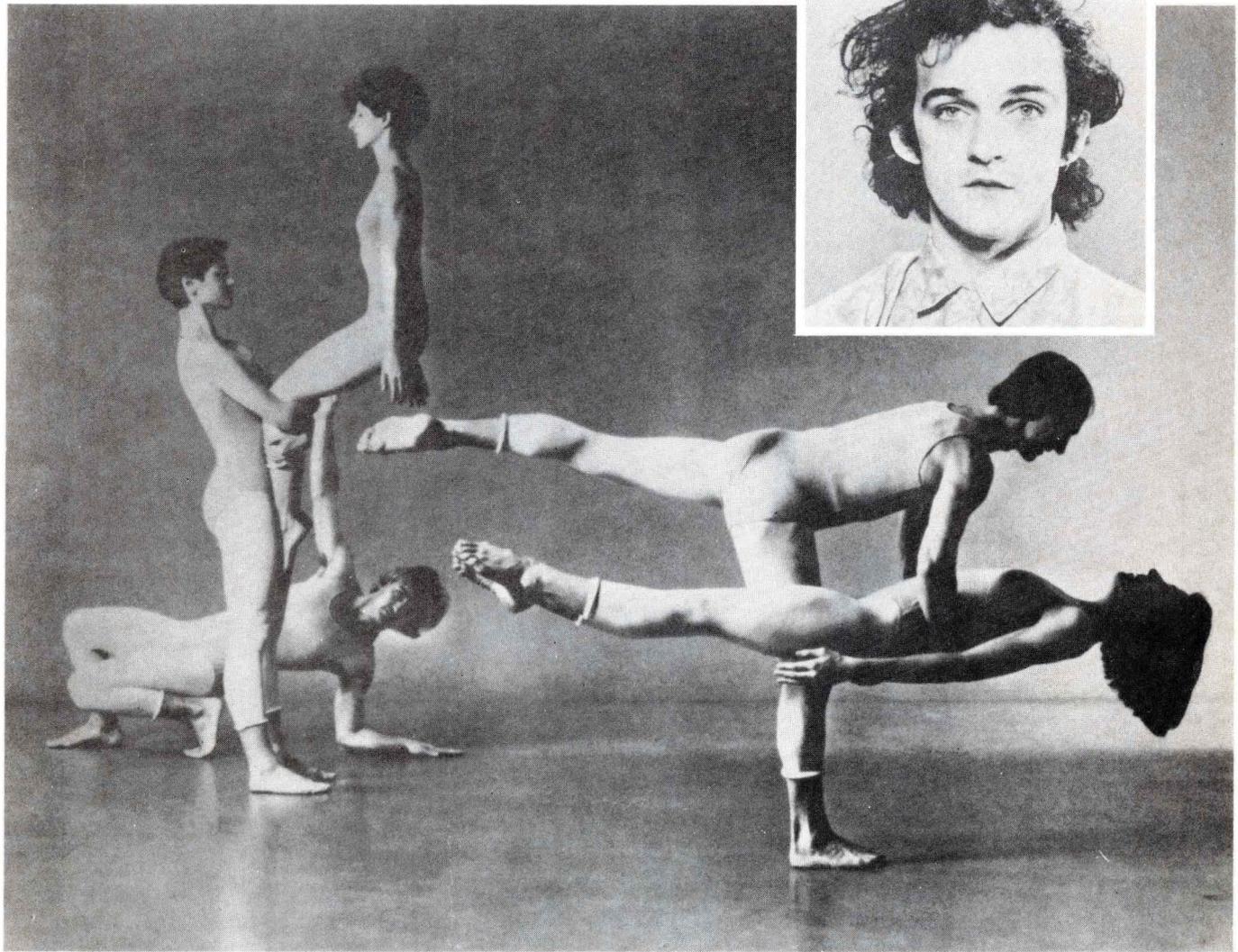


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# Mark Morris: A New Balanchine?

by Elizabeth Elam



BEATRIZ SCHILLER

Members of the Mark Morris Dance Group. Inset: Mark Morris.

The Mark Morris Dance Group appears in Cullen Theater at Wortham Center November 20 and 21, sponsored by Society for the Performing Arts. Morris also choreographed Houston Grand Opera's production of Nixon in China. — The Editor.

WHEN Mark Morris and his company danced nude in Boston last year, national critics adored it, one of them calling Morris' final naked attitude in *Striptease* "a shocker and a beauty." Yet, in Seattle, when the company fondled a stageful of plastic dolls in a dance called *Lovey*, a good many members of the audience booed and walked out.

Whether Morris is in the throes of

performing one of his rich, full-bodied masterworks, such as *Gloria*, set to Vivaldi, or pushing the limits of his success and credibility with unabashed frontal nudity, he is without a doubt one of today's hottest young choreographers. At 30, Morris is considered by many to be the new Balanchine: a dance master who sees movement as the embodiment of music and whose work echoes the moment.

Although it was the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in 1984 that exploded Morris to stardom, he had been making dances for his own company for four years, and before that, as a teen, for dance classes in his native Seattle. Even

as a child, says Morris, he was leaping over living room furniture, dancing to the *1812 Overture*.

"I had enormous support from both my parents and my two sisters," said Morris on a recent *Dance in America* telecast. "I never had trouble being a boy who danced; my talent was appreciated."

At the age of nine he was taken by his mother to see the legendary flamenco pair José Greco and Nina Lorca. It was then that his fate was sealed.

"I told my mother that was what I wanted to do. So we found a teacher, Verla Flowers, and I studied flamenco, then ballet and folk dancing."

He even joined a local Balkan folk

(Continued on page 57)



dance troupe, Koleda, and twirled his way through the rigorous Slavic rhythms until he finished high school, when he took off for Europe.

After a year of backpacking on the continent and studying classical dance in Madrid, Morris arrived in New York. It was 1976 and within two weeks he was dancing for the Eliot Feld Ballet. Later he moved to the companies of modernists Lar Lubovitch and Laura Dean, and finally in 1980 formed his own troupe.

When Morris decided it was time to leave New York, his work was already getting a fair amount of acclaim from the dance community. At first, he says, only friends of company members attended, but after his appearance at the Brooklyn Academy and an encouraging review from *New Yorker* critic Arlene Croce, Morris began getting more attention than he wanted — it unnerved him.

"I'd had enough. New York is disgusting," he laughs. "So I thought where I could go and Seattle seemed the likely choice. My family is there, and the things I like about Seattle haven't changed: mountains, water, city, water, mountains — like a sandwich."

The only real problem having his base in the Northwest is lacking proximity to his dancers, half of whom still live in New York. But Seattle, he says, gives him an alternate space to think and create.

"When I'm in New York, I make calm, orderly dances. But the ones I make in Seattle all seem to be so violent. It's not on purpose. I've just looked back and found it's happened that way."

Now a decade after he first hit New York, Morris holds much of the dance world in thrall. Not because he can perform naked in Boston and get away with it, but because his mind holds a veritable dictionary of scenarios and structures. He is actually aware of the world outside the theatre and has constructed a unique vocabulary for turning his perception of life into art.

As handily as Morris makes a mock-epic about detergent commercials and housewives — *Soap Powders and Detergents* — he can find a movement metaphor for the abusive and impersonal world of casual sex. *Dogtown*, a dance for three women and three men costumed only in their skivvies and tights, is a prime example of Morris at his most violently contemporary. Male dancers, in low-rise nylon briefs, make cruel, clutching motions at their partners' breasts while the women paw at their partners' chests and groins.

Morris' preference for with-it, accessible themes is obvious; they account for nearly half of his material. Yet he also has a flair for concocting the abstract and universal, and the way he chooses to manipulate time as well as space seems to depend almost exclusively on the musical score. In *Love, You Have Won*, for instance, Morris uses the various movements of a Vivaldi chamber cantata to shape a duet for himself and another male dancer.

"I think it's a great tragedy that more choreographers don't know music," laments Morris, who studied piano for a while, but claims he has "no technique."

"I read music. I took a music theory course in high school and listen to an enormous amount of music." Morris has a large record library as diverse as his taste in music and will listen to a piece dozens, sometimes hundreds, of times before turning it into a dance.

Like Balanchine, when Morris hears music, he sees dance. But this uncanny resemblance to the late Russian-American doesn't begin and end with the ability to organize choreography around a musical score. Morris, too, is a fatalist who feels he was destined to make dances, and he does so in the same objective, self-effacing way that Balanchine did.

"It seems inevitable," says Morris, "that I'm doing this. I knew what I wanted when I started dancing. I didn't know it was hard, that I'd live in five different time zones and never be in any one place for very long."

"But I'm pretty much counting on living for a very long time and choreographing really well until it's not important any more, or at least not more important than growing roses like my mother does so well."

"I try to avoid what I call the 'masterpiece syndrome' or trying to make everything better and better. I just want to learn from each piece — and have people know who I am and that I am not exactly the same as my dances." ★

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Cullen Hall  
Society for Performing Arts

November 20, 21, 1987

**MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP**

RUTH DAVIDSON TINA FEHLANDT SUSAN HADLEY  
PENNY HUTCHINSON DAVID LANDIS JON MENSINGER  
MARK MORRIS DONALD MOUTON GUILLERMO RESTO KEITH SABADO  
JENNIFER THIENES PHER VOULKOS TERI WEKSLER

**MARK MORRIS**  
Artistic Director

**BARRY ALTERMAN**  
General Manager

**NANCY UMANOFF**  
Managing Director

PHIL SANDSTROM  
Lighting Designer

JOHN VADINO  
Technical Director

ALBERT C. MATHERS  
Stage Manager

PROGRAM A

All choreography by Mark Morris

MY PARTY

Music: Jean Francaix  
Dancers: Company Members

DECK OF CARDS

Music: Jimmy Logsdon, George Jones, T. Texas Tyler  
Dancers: Mark Morris, Donald Mouton

<sup>The</sup>  
~~FUGUE AND FANTASY~~

Music: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
~~Dancers: Fugue: To Be Announced~~  
Fantasy: Ruth Davidson, Susan Hadley, Jon Mensinger, Donald Mouton, Keith Sabado

- Intermission -

ONE CHARMING NIGHT

Music: Henry Purcell  
Dancers: Mark Morris, Teri Weksler

MARBLE HALLS

Music: J.S. Bach (Concerto for 2 Harpsichords and Strings in C Minor, BWV 1060)  
Dancers: Ruth Davidson, Tina Fehlandt, Susan Hadley, Penny Hutchinson, David Landis,  
Jon Mensinger, Donald Mouton, ~~Guillermo Resto~~, Keith Sabado, Teri Weksler

Program subject to change

~~Kraig Patterson~~ Pier Voukko

PROGRAM B

All choreography by Mark Morris

STRICT SONGS

Music: Lou Harrison  
Dancers: Ruth Davidson, Tina Fehlandt, Susan Hadley, Penny Hutchinson, David Landis,  
Jon Mensinger, Donald Mouton, ~~Guillermo Resto~~, Keith Sabado, Pier Voulkos

Dedicated to the memory of Liberace. Commissioned by the Seattle Men's Chorus.

BIJOUX

Music: Eric Satie (Quatre Petites Melodies, Ludions)  
Dancer: Teri Weksler

SONATA FOR CLARINET AND PIANO

Music: Francis Poulenc  
Dancers: Ruth Davidson, Tina Fehlandt, Susan Hadley, Penny Hutchinson, David Landis,  
Jon Mensinger, Mark Morris, Donald Mouton, ~~Guillermo Resto~~, Keith Sabado,  
Pier Voulkos

- Intermission -

GLORIA

Music: Antonio Vivaldi, (Gloria in D)  
Dancers: Ruth Davidson, Tina Fehlandt, Susan Hadley, Penny Hutchinson, David Landis,  
Jon Mensinger, Donald Mouton, ~~Guillermo Resto~~, Keith Sabado, Teri Weksler

Program subject to change

*Craig  
Patterson*

These performances were made possible, in part, with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

### BIOGRAPHIES

MARK MORRIS was born, raised and currently lives in Seattle, where he studied with Verla Flowers and Perry Brunson. He has performed with a diverse assortment of companies over the years, including the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, Hannah Kahn Dance Company, Laura Dean Dancers and Musicians, Eliot Feld Ballet and Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble. In addition to his own group, he has set works on CoDanceCo, Jacob's Pillow Dancers, Spokane Ballet, Batsheva Dance Company, Concert Dance Company of Boston and Repertory Dance Company of Canada. In 1985 Mr. Morris created Mort Subite for the Boston Ballet, one of nine commissions of the National Choreography Project and received a second commission in 1986 to create Esteemed Guests for the Joffrey Ballet. In 1986 Mr. Morris choreographed the "Dance of the Seven Veils" for the Seattle Opera's production of Salome. Next year he will choreograph Orpheus and Eurydice for the Seattle Opera and also direct that company's production of Die Fledermaus. Most recently, Mr. Morris completed the choreography for Nixon In China, music by John Adams, direction by Peter Sellars, which will premiere at the Houston Grand Opera this fall. Mr. Morris has received several NEA Choreography Fellowships, a 1984 "Bessie" award for choreographic achievement, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

THE MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP was formed in 1980 and gave its first annual New York home season concert that year at the Cunningham Studio. For four seasons the Group was produced by Dance Theater Workshop and has since appeared twice at the Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival. Since 1984, the Group has toured extensively throughout the United States and Europe and was featured on an hour-long program on the PBS Dance in America series.

PHIL SANDSTROM (Lighting Designer), recipient of a 1986 New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie), has designed original lighting for more than fifty dance companies. He has designed for the Mark Morris Dance Group since 1982, was stage lighting designer for the Group's PBS Dance In America television program and designed Mr. Morris' Esteemed Guests for the Joffrey Ballet. He is currently Production Manager and resident lighting designer at Dance Theater Workshop.

ALBERT C. MATHERS (Stage Manager) joined Mark Morris Dance Group in the fall of 1986 after completing his second season as stagemanager of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. He is a graduate of North Carolina School of the Arts. His professional stagemanagement credits include work with such artists as Marta Renzi, Charles Moulton, Danny Buraczeski, Victoria Marks and Harry Streep. Mr. Mathers is also a professional clown.

JOHN VADINO (Technical Director) has worked with numerous dance companies including Technical Director for Eliot Feld Ballet and Production Manager and Lighting Designer for Bill Evans Dance Company. Mr. Vadino resides in Seattle where he is Producing Director for Allegro!, Seattle's dance festival, and is Production manager/Booking Director for the Bumbershoot Festival. Mr. Vadino is also Production Director for the Northwest Folklife Festival and Technical Director for the International Children's Festival.

ROB BESSERER danced with the Jose Limon Dance Company before joining the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company with whom he has danced for many years. Currently he works with Mark Morris and Martha Clark. He was in Ms. Clarke's Vienna: Lusthaus and this season's The Hunger Artist and will be performing this summer in The Garden of Earthly Delights at the Minetta Lane Theatre. He can be seen in the upcoming film, Bright Lights, Big City. In 1984 he was awarded a Bessie.

RUTH DAVIDSON, a native New Yorker, attended the High School of Performing Arts, and went on to receive her BFA from SUNY Purchase. She has danced in the companies of Hannah Kahn, Don Redlich, and the recent production of Susan Hadley's Reunion. Ms. Davidson joined the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1980.

TINA FEHLANDT grew up in Wilmington, DE and started dancing at age 5. She has danced with the Mark Morris Dance Group since 1980, and has staged Mr. Morris's work on Repertory Dance Company of Canada, Concert Dance Company of Boston, and the Boston Ballet. Ms. Fehlandt has taught dance technique in New York, Seattle and on company tours.

SUSAN HADLEY received her M.A. in dance from Ohio State University, danced in Senta Driver's Harry for four years, and performed in Meredith Monk's Quarry at LaMama. She has presented works with composer Bradley Sowash in New York City since 1984 and they are recent recipients of a collaborative fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

PENNY HUTCHINSON received her early dance training from the Juilliard School as an apprentice with the First Chamber Dance Company and as a dancer with Diane Germaine & Dancers. She has taught in Seattle, Washington, Sitka, Alaska and New York City. She has been a member of the Mark Morris Dance Group since 1980.

DAVID LANDIS grew up in California where he received an MFA in dance from CalArts. In 1981, he toured briefly with his own company before moving to New York where he danced with CoDanceCo, Ruby Shang, Charles Moulton and Susan Marshall. He has danced with the Mark Morris Dance Group since 1983 and regularly produces his own work on both coasts. Mr. Landis studies with Jocelyn Lorenz.

JON MENSINGER was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He attended Ohio State University and New York University, and has danced with Maggie Patton, Jim Self, Douglas Dunn and the American Dance Machine. Mr. Mensinger first danced with the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1982.

DONALD MOUTON, a Cajun, was born in Crowley, Louisiana, the "International Rice Capital of the World." He holds a B.A. in theatre from the University of Southwestern Louisiana. In New York he has performed with Rudy Perez, Rosalind Newman, Jane Comfort, Susan Marshall and CoDanceCo. He has danced with Mark Morris since 1980.

GUILIERMO RESTO, recipient of a 1986 New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie), has danced with Mark Morris since 1983.

KEITH SABADO was born in Seattle where he studied at the University of Washington and performed in works by Marian Anderson, Nelle Fisher and Todd Bolender. In New York he has danced with the companies of Pauline Koner, Hannah Kahn, Jim Self and Rosalind Newman. He has performed with the Mark Morris Dance Group since 1984.

JENNIFER THIENES was raised in Seattle where she began dancing at the age of six. She performed with European companies for three years and in New York has performed with

