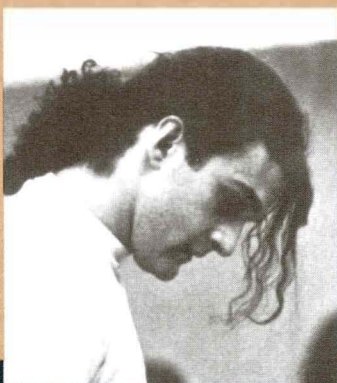


In the Wings

Spring 1998

Fusing Jazz and Classical Music

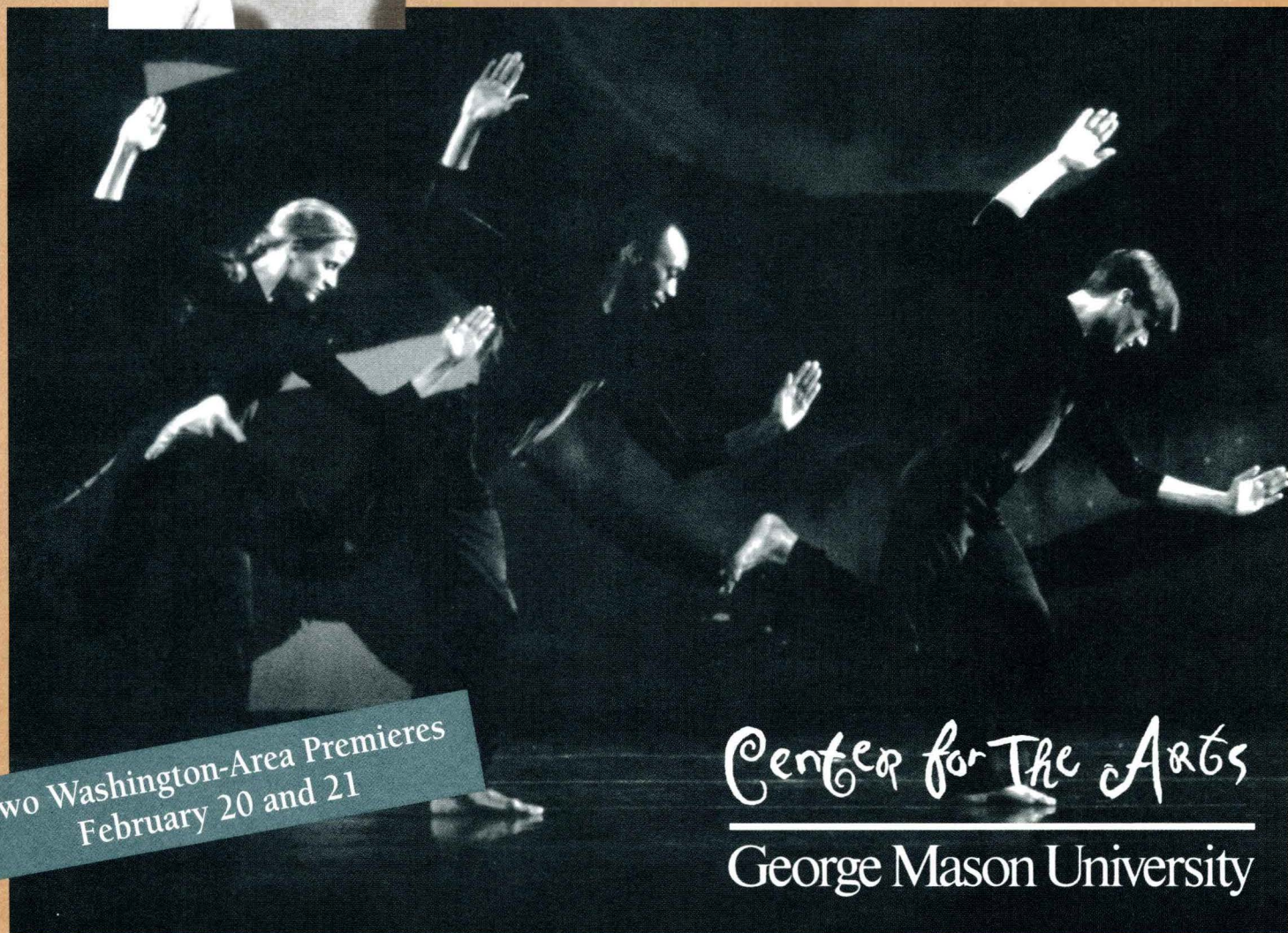
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*Choreographer
Mark Morris*

Global Influences

on the Revolutionary, Outspoken "Darling" of Dance



Two Washington-Area Premieres
February 20 and 21

Center for The Arts

George Mason University

IMMIGRANT INFLUENCES



All of Mark Morris' experiences are reflected in his later choreography, which bears the stamp of exuberant physicality, pleasure in unexpected rhythms, an affinity for gravity and connection with the earth, and joy in the diversity of community.

Seattle is a city poised on the edge of the Pacific, a last stop for those on the great westward migratory settlement of America. More recently, it is also a gateway to newer waves of immigration from the Pacific. The American choreographer Mark Morris was born in Seattle and spent his formative years in this city at land's end. Despite the fact that some of Morris' ancestors have been in America since the 1630s, he himself has the artistic advantage of being a child of the late twentieth century who is the sum of the cultures this country has absorbed over the course of its history. And Morris' art reflects a vision of human community that embraces diversity and revels in difference and distinctiveness.

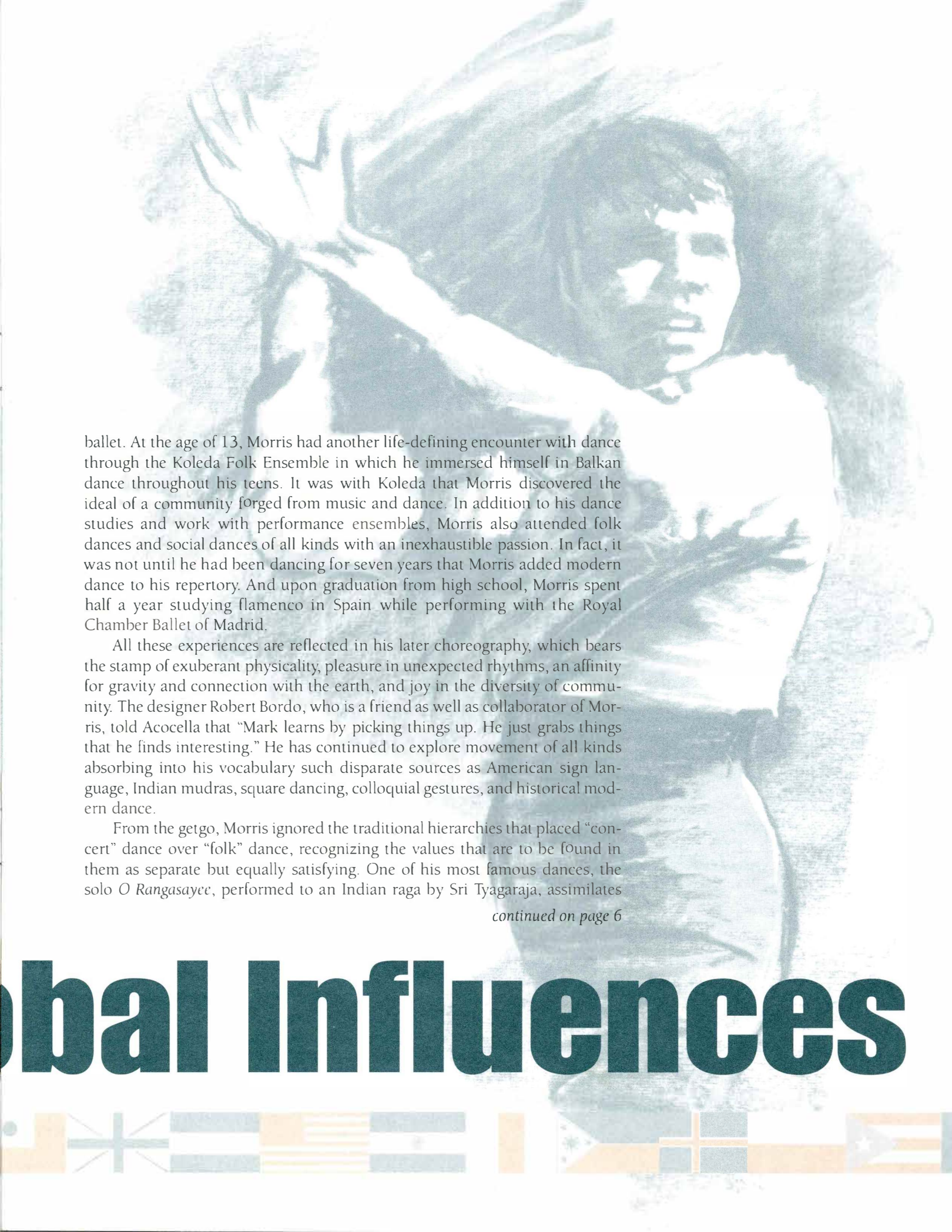
Morris came of age during the 1960s when American cities were going through tremendous changes as immigrant tides shifted from Western and Eastern Europe to Asia and the Caribbean. Morris grew up in a working-class neighborhood that was mainly Italian-American and Jewish when he was born but changed to mostly Black and Asian by the time he was in grade school. Surrounded by immigrants from places such as Barbados and Samoa, and a family that encouraged intermingling with these newcomers, Morris imbibed the rhythms, customs, and speech patterns of his neighbors, but his real course in cultural assimilation came through his experiences in music and dance.

Morris is extraordinary in having embraced every kind of dance and music that he has encountered in this nation of immigrants. He himself came into modern dance through a background in folk and national styles. His first dance experience came when he was eight years old and saw the Jose Greco flamenco company. It was, for him, a revelation, akin to Saul falling from his horse, blinded by the light. He had found his calling and his passion. Never mind that he had no ethnic or cultural connection with the form or the culture from which flamenco sprang. He found a teacher, Verla Flowers, who told Morris' biographer Joan Acocella of the boy's seriousness: "He really intended to be a professional Spanish dancer, as soon as possible. It didn't matter to him that he was nine." Flowers quickly introduced him to a potpourri of other national dance styles, including Mexican, cowboy, Ukrainian, and Russian, as well as fencing and

Choreographer Mark Morris' **Glo**

by Suzanne Carbonneau





ballet. At the age of 13, Morris had another life-defining encounter with dance through the Koleda Folk Ensemble in which he immersed himself in Balkan dance throughout his teens. It was with Koleda that Morris discovered the ideal of a community forged from music and dance. In addition to his dance studies and work with performance ensembles, Morris also attended folk dances and social dances of all kinds with an inexhaustible passion. In fact, it was not until he had been dancing for seven years that Morris added modern dance to his repertory. And upon graduation from high school, Morris spent half a year studying flamenco in Spain while performing with the Royal Chamber Ballet of Madrid.

All these experiences are reflected in his later choreography, which bears the stamp of exuberant physicality, pleasure in unexpected rhythms, an affinity for gravity and connection with the earth, and joy in the diversity of community. The designer Robert Bordo, who is a friend as well as collaborator of Morris, told Acocella that "Mark learns by picking things up. He just grabs things that he finds interesting." He has continued to explore movement of all kinds absorbing into his vocabulary such disparate sources as American sign language, Indian mudras, square dancing, colloquial gestures, and historical modern dance.

From the getgo, Morris ignored the traditional hierarchies that placed "concert" dance over "folk" dance, recognizing the values that are to be found in them as separate but equally satisfying. One of his most famous dances, the solo *O Rangasayee*, performed to an Indian raga by Sri Tyagaraja, assimilates

continued on page 6

Global Influences





What Will Mark Morris Dance Group Perform at Mason?

A fascinating work created in 1982!

Canonic 3/4 Studies

Nine dancers moving to sensuous Indian music

Two Washington D.C. premieres!

New Work (still untitled)

based on John Harbison's *November 19, 1828*

the day that Schubert died

Rhymes with Silver

A collaboration with composer Lou Harrison and cellist Yo-Yo Ma, is a stunning 45-minute dance in 12 movements, four of which are for solo cello. The piece, made for 16 dancers, features a huge, dramatically colored backdrop created by British painter Howard Hodgkin. This new work has been critically described as "one of the deepest works Morris has made...Everything is eventful, a balance of pleasurable repetitions and shocking little surprises."



Mark Morris dancers performing in *Rhymes with Silver*.

Mark Morris' Global Influences

continued from page 5

movement from Indian kathak dance and blends it with his Western training. Morris has also choreographed cowboy dances, ballets, operas, and musicals. Three years ago he was commissioned by the Southern Slavic troupe Zivili to choreograph *The Office*, a work grounded in his Koleda experiences, which has since been taken into the repertoire of his own company.

Morris is also known as possibly the most musical of living choreographers, and the same catholicity of taste that he demonstrates in his movement choices is reflected in their musical accompaniment. Morris has choreographed to Beethoven and Brahms, to Mozart, Haydn, Vivaldi and Tchaikovsky, but he has also choreographed to Stravinsky, Satie, and Schoenberg, to Henry Cowell, Virgil Thomson, Harry Partch, Lou Harrison, and John Adams, to Stephen Foster and George Gershwin, to Yoko Ono, Michelle Shocked and the Violent Femmes, to traditional Spanish, Romanian, Tahitian and Thai songs, to contemporary Indian film scores, and to calypso music. He has even choreographed dances that are performed in silence.

In 1988, Morris was invited to become the resident choreographer at the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie in Belgium, one of Europe's grandest opera houses, and he remained there with his company until 1991. This can be seen as a kind of reverse immigrant experience, fulfilling Tocqueville's belief that the social and political equality promised by the American experiment would come to replace the aristocratic

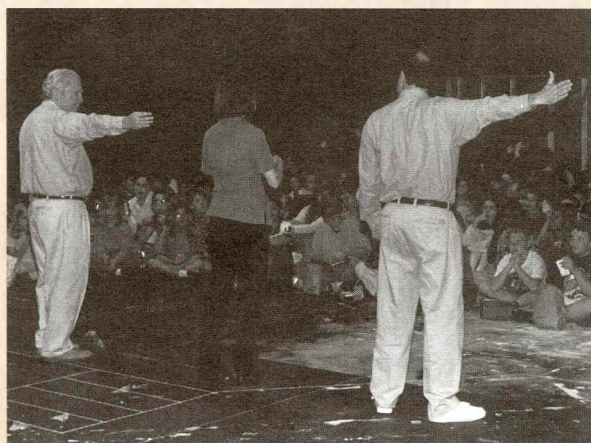
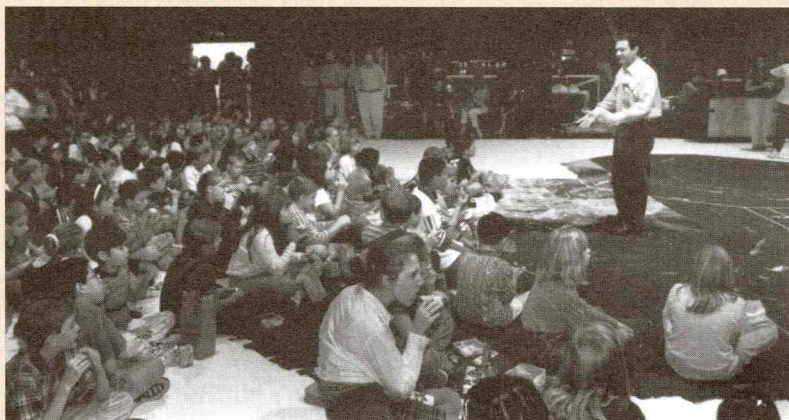
institutions of Europe. Since his return to the United States, Morris continues to work on an astonishing range of projects in addition to his work with his own company. Most recently he has been directing and choreographing music theater, both in opera and in the American commercial theater. In his most recent theatrical venture, Morris has tackled the darker side of the American immigrant experience. As director and choreographer of *The Capeman*, the Simon-Derek Walcott musical that recently opened on Broadway, Morris has been called upon to bring to life a fact-based story of racially motivated murder and of ultimate redemption. In this, as in all of his artmaking, Morris continues to prove himself the ultimate democrat, for whom all forms of human experience—from the lowliest of folk art to the "highest" of classical European culture—are grist for his choreographic mill. ♦

Morris came of age during the 1960s when American cities were going through tremendous changes as immigrant tides shifted from Western and Eastern Europe to Asia and the Caribbean.

Mark Morris Stages Paul Simon's New Musical *The Capeman* on Broadway

This past winter, Mark Morris followed in the footsteps of Bob Fosse and Jerome Robbins by directing and choreographing a Broadway musical. *The Capeman* is based on the true story of Salvador Agron, a young Puerto Rican man who was convicted of double murder in New York City in 1959. The work features a stellar cast performing Paul Simon's incorporation of Puerto Rican dance and sacred music with American doo-wop and gospel.

AROUND THE COMMUNITY



Hunter's Woods Elementary prepares for their performances on May 20-22.

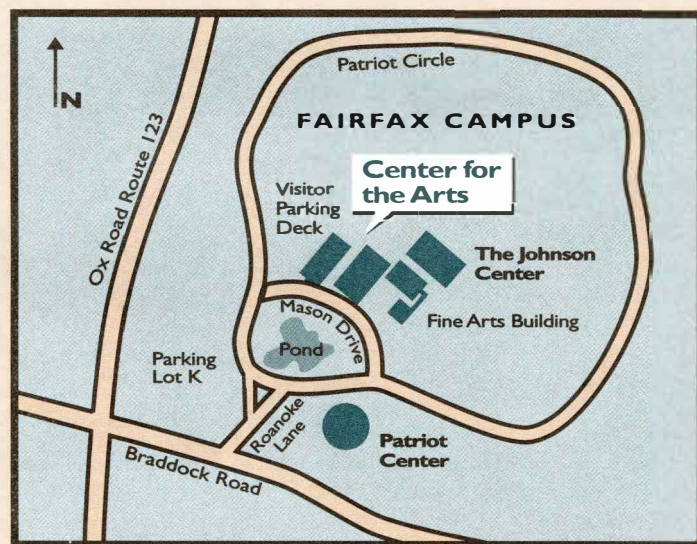
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Next issue features Center for the Arts '98-'99 Season Announcement

Blues Rooms

A Collaboration by Dianne McIntyre and Olu Dara

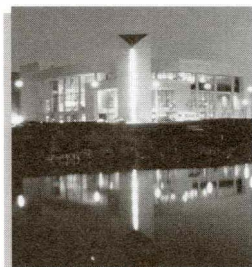
This fascinating new piece explores the birth and growth of the American art form known as the "Blues." Dancing, singing and folklore abound in this musical tour through a house full of some delightful storytellers.



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