

In the Wings

Spring 1999



The John Pizzarelli Trio
and Margaret Whiting



Spotlight on the Artists

See pages 6-7

Christopher Parkening
and Jubilant Sykes



Mark
Morris & Yo-Yo Ma...

Together in two area premieres!

Center for The Arts

George Mason University



Center for The Arts

www.gmu.edu/cfa

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10 a.m.—4 p.m.

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10 a.m.—7:30 p.m.

Saturday

noon—5 p.m.

Charge tickets by phone:

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Parking Deck next to the

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Free Parking in Lot K

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The mission of the Institute of the Arts at George Mason University is to make the arts a pervasive presence in the lives of George Mason students and Northern Virginia residents. This strengthens the belief that the arts educate and enrich the lives of all people. The Center for the Arts is a state-of-the-art, multi-theater performance complex that includes the Concert Hall, TheaterSpace, Harris Theater, Dance Performance Studio, Johnson Center and Fine Arts Galleries and Johnson Center Cinema.

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On the Cover

Mark Morris Dance Group, *Falling Down Stairs*.
Mark Morris and Yo-Yo Ma.

Photos by Cylla Von Tiedemann

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Patron:

We are very fortunate to be one of only six cities worldwide where audiences will witness the coming-together of two very unique and wonderful talents: this April 6 and 7 we proudly present Mark Morris Dance Group, joined onstage both evenings by cellist Yo-Yo Ma. The program includes two D.C.-area premieres, *Falling Down Stairs* and *The Argument*. The company also dances *Rhymes with Silver*, which premiered here last season.

Falling Down Stairs, danced to Bach's *Third Suite for Unaccompanied Cello*, has been seen on PBS television and had its only live performance at Berkeley in 1997.

Audiences will see the history of one of the world's most popular, and often misunderstood, dances in February when the group *Tango Buenos Aires* appears with their program *Song of Buenos Aires*. Live accompaniment is provided by an ensemble led by the group's musical director and founder, Osvaldo Requena.

Join us on Sunday, March 7 when the rich, pure voices of Chorovaya Akademia, Russia's premier all-male choir, return to our hall. Last here in 1993, this group astounded audiences with a magnificent *a cappella* performance.

We also feature two very different guitarists accompanying two very different vocalists. In early March, we present the confident, mature musical interpretations of John Pizzarelli and the legendary Margaret Whiting in an evening of tunes from *The Great American Songbook*. Later in the month Christopher Parkening's masterful guitar playing is showcased as he's joined by special guest Jubilant Sykes, a young, powerful baritone who'll perform folk songs and spirituals.



Betsy Brininger, Director
Institute of the Arts

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Photo: Neil Adams



Yo-Yo Ma

by Anita Amirrezvani

Not many classical cellists would reach out to collaborate with ice dancers, but then again, not many cellists are Yo-Yo Ma.

The 41-year-old artist has already produced 45 albums, 10 of which have won Grammys, and is in constant demand on concert stages around the world. But Ma seems driven to expand his musical vocabulary. In the past few years he has joined forces with artists in other fields—dance, film, even gardening—and created collaborations with them that sound as fascinating as they are unusual.

All of these collaborations are based on Bach's *Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*, which Ma has been playing since he was four years old. He has recorded and performed this music on many occasions, but now he is reexamining the works through the prism of other creative minds.

"If you take a piece and give it to someone and it comes out differently, do you come out differently? And the answer is, 'Of course,'" Ma says in a telephone interview. "You're fed with someone else's imagination, and it becomes part of the history of that piece with you."

Ma's collaborations include artists as diverse as choreographer Mark Morris, ice dancers Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean, noted Kabuki artist Tamasaburo, Canadian film maker Atom Egoyan (*Exotica*), filmmaker Francois Girard (*Thirty-Two Short Films About Glen Gould*), and garden designer Julie Moir Messervy.

Ma began developing the idea for the collaborations a few years ago when he was thinking about philosopher and musician Albert Schweitzer's description of Bach's music as pictorial.

"He wrote about composers as people who were maybe in their heart of hearts painters," Ma says. What would happen, thought Ma, if he brought out this pictorial quality by collaborating with artists in other fields? One of the first people to cross his mind was Morris, whom he had admired from the first time he saw him interviewed on British television.

Morris is the creator of many highly regarded works of modern dance, including the satirical *The Hard*



Mark Morris Dance Group. Photo by Cyla von Tiedemann

with cellos

Nut, a takeoff on the *Nutcracker*, as well as masterworks such as *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, set to the Handel score of the same name.

It's a measure of Ma's own humility that he says of Morris, "I was scared to death about calling him." It took Morris a good nine months to say yes, and more than a year to develop and film the piece.

The dancers and Ma retreated to an idyllic dance site in rural Massachusetts. The film records their entire collaboration, including many touching, thoughtful conversations between the two. In one of these, Morris recounts a "horrible" image that came to his mind while thinking about Bach's *Third Suite for Unaccompanied Cello*, the music used in the piece.

Unable to sleep, he visualized a dancer falling down a flight of stairs, ending up with blood trickling out of his or her mouth. That nightmarish image gave the dance its title, *Falling Down Stairs*, as well as one of the central elements of its stage design. However it's only one creative starting point for the finished work, as the film makes clear.

Ma's enthusiasm for the process all but bubbles off the screen. "It sounds like a cliché, but working with them actually changed my life," says Ma. "Their union of mind and body was of a kind that I've rarely experienced. I was just bowled over. The dancers are not reading scores—their body *becomes* the score."

It has also changed the way he thinks about Bach's third cello suite, he says. One section of the music has motions that seem "swirly." Now, says Ma, "it's hard for me to play it without thinking about it." These



images have also become part of what Ma describes a lifelong imaginative palette that he draws on when he plays. "It's the basis of improvisation: You can choose where you want to go."

Ma has found that such collaborations require a great deal of trust. It can take a year to understand something about each other's fields and develop a workable result. "Every profession is very narrowing its frame, because you have to be very specific. You hunker down into it. But it also becomes conservative. To try to break out of it requires a leap of faith; you have to jump at some point."

Creativity can be measured, he adds, by the learning curve and the amount of excitement a project engenders. This cross-pollination of music with other disciplines is a unique way of pushing all the artists involved to new limits. For Ma, it means going even deeper into his music. "It's an experiment on what the world of imagination is about," he says. ♦

Tickets for Mark Morris Dance Group and Yo-Yo Ma, April 6 & 7, are \$32, \$40 and \$50.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Center for The Arts

APRIL

**One of only 6 cities worldwide!
Washington area premiere of**

*Falling Down Stairs and
The Argument*

**Mark Morris Dance Group
and cellist Yo-Yo Ma**

Tuesday, April 6, 8 p.m.

Wednesday, April 7, 8 p.m.

CH, \$50, \$40, \$32

GMU Players

A Doll House

Friday, April 16, 8 p.m.

Saturday, April 17, 2 & 8 p.m.

Sunday, April 18, 2 p.m.

BB, FREE

GMU Dance Company

Thursday, April 15, 8 p.m.

Friday, April 16, 8 p.m.

Saturday, April 17, 8 p.m.

HT, \$10

Students: \$7

**Keyboard Conversations®
with Jeffrey Siegel
Mozart and "Friends?"**

Sunday, April 18, 7 p.m.

CH, \$27

Miami City Ballet

Edward Villella, artistic director

Saturday, April 24, 8 p.m.

Sunday, April 25, 2 p.m.

CH, \$40, \$32, \$26



Miami City
Ballet

GMU Players

Agamemnon

April 29 – May 2 and

May 6 – 9

Thursday – Saturday, 8 p.m.

Saturday – Sunday, 2 p.m.

TS, \$8

Virginia Opera

The Pirates of Penzance

Peter Mark, general and artistic director

Friday, April 30, 8 p.m.

Saturday, May 1, 8 p.m.

Sunday, May 2, 2 p.m.

CH, \$55, \$44, \$35

MAY

GMU Dance Company

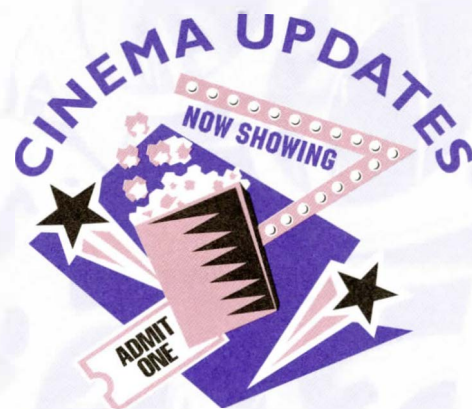
Thursday, May 6, 8 p.m.

Friday, May 7, 8 p.m.

Saturday, May 8, 8 p.m.

DP, \$7

Students: \$5



More Movies at **Mason!**

**New spring films
begin February 4
with Pleasantville**

This season's titles include Oprah Winfrey's *Beloved*, a look at the 70s rock scene in *Velvet Goldmine* and Drew Barrymore in *Ever After*.

Showtimes are Thursdays and Fridays at 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Saturdays at 8 p.m.

All tickets are \$5 at the door, \$3 Mason employees, free to Mason students. **Free popcorn at all screenings!**

The Cinema is located on the lower level of the George W. Johnson Center in the heart of the Fairfax Campus.

For a complete schedule, call the Center for the Arts Box Office **703-993-8888** or visit the cinema online **www.gmu.edu/cfa/cinema**.

We Welcome Your Feedback!

Contact *In the Wings* by logging onto www.gmu.edu/cfa or by writing:

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