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Dance: Morris Troupe Offers Eclectic Works

By JACK ANDERSON

BY taking choreographic ideas from here, there and everywhere, Mark Morris reveled in eclecticism at his Mark Morris Dance Group's Saturday night concert at the Bessie Schönberg Theater. Obviously, for Mr. Morris, movement is the greatest fun in the world.

There were only three dancers in "Not Goodbye." Yet their slow traversals of the stage transformed them into members of some endless processional, and their rippling movements to Tahitian music said much about how lovely trained bodies can be.

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"Etudes Modernes/Jr. High" consisted of two supposedly separate works that were danced together by presenting sections from each work in alternation. The results included some absurd contrasts in movement quality: when the women of "Etudes" were not mysteriously engaged in odd contortions and frantic runs, the men of "Jr. High" were doing such purely mundane things as trudging to school, answering questions in class and trying to look macho in the gym.

Mr. Morris put his dancers into jeans and set them moving to Southern gospel songs in "Songs That Tell a Story." And their merry kicks and

gallops made them the nicest hillbilies imaginable. Occasionally, they acted out the song lyrics in a deliberately naïve manner, and if they never mocked the songs, neither did they take them as the literal gospel truth. The piece thereby indicated some of the perils of eclecticism, by suggesting that although Mr. Morris likes to play with ideas, he does not always commit himself wholeheartedly to them.

He came closest to such commitment in his most ambitious effort, "New Love Song Waltzes," to the Brahms waltzes that George Balanchine drew upon for the second scene of his "Liebeslieder Walzer." However, this was no vision of a 19th-century ballroom.

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Responding to the music's abundant energy, Mr. Morris created a breezy dance and he was not afraid to have his 10 dancers swoop about or to gesture extravagantly. Men often raised women aloft. Yet there also were instances when unusual effects of weight or design were achieved through same-sex partnering. And the entire dance made one feel young and head-over-heels in love.

Mr. Morris recently announced that he is moving to Seattle. But I hope he returns from time to time to show us new dances.