

NOVEMBER 23, 1982

Eclectic Circuits

By Amanda Smith

MARK MORRIS. At Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie Schonberg Theater, (November 4 to 7). *Not Goodbye*, *Etudes Modernes/jr. high*, *Songs That Tell a Story*, and *New Love Song Waltzes*.

The news about 26-year-old choreographer Mark Morris is both good and bad. The good news is that his dances are intelligent, impish, exuberant, eccentric, unpredictable, witty, and wise. The bad news is that he may soon decamp for his native Seattle.

Morris's works have the eclectic vision and diversity of someone who's done stints with Eliot Feld, Laura Dean, Lar Lubovitch, Hannah Kahn, and the Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble. His *Not Goodbye*, for instance, blends postmodern form with a style conjured from languid Pacific Island dancing, the whole set to traditional Tahitian music. First Morris, then in sequence two bare-breasted women, each wearing only a wrapped skirt, kneel singly in a pool of light, rippling their bodies. Then they stand and circle, their sinuous movement punctuated by a peculiar leg extension capped with a flexed foot. One by one, they progress in canon across the stage, and when the last one leaves, Morris returns to his original position to start again, suggesting an unbroken chain which, because it never ends, never says good-bye.

In *Etudes Modernes/jr. high*, Morris alternates two separate dances, the older *Etudes Modernes* for women—mostly rather formally constructed pieces modeled on high-style modern dance—and the new *jr. high* for men. The men's dances, ruminations on adolescence and the difference between masculine and feminine, stole the show. In its most comical segment, four "boys" stand in a line, hands up, waiting to be called on in class. Deadpan, they wave, shift, support their arms, looking bored all the while. Finally lowering their hands, they step forward in a series of gestures differentiating the ways of the sexes: three examine their nails by curling their fingers toward them while one extends his arm full out like a woman checking to see if her newly applied polish has dried. The segment is called "test," and the one who doesn't "pass" is Morris, hootingly funny because he's so unabashedly different from the rest. You get the idea that, even in junior high school, Morris must have known that that difference is what makes not only horse races but choreographers.

Morris is an entertaining performer and an interesting mover. He's got a slight pompadour, dark eyes that look as if makeup's smudged around them, and a body whose muscles seem slightly thick and give his movement a lush, almost Duncanesque sense of weight. Although he didn't dance himself in *Songs That Tell a Story*, that informing use of weight is one of the integral components of the piece. Made for two men and a woman in ripped, bleached blue jeans and plaid shirts, the dance is set to the Louvin Brothers' twangy gospel music. The movement's full of jiggles and clogs and fast-moving falls and rebounds, here and there a reference to Graham heroics (arms up, hip thrust forward) or to the angelic (the woman suddenly mounts the feet of a man lying on his back on the floor, legs up, and she assumes the pose of a Michelangelo putto). Ever the eclectic, Morris also throws in some tongue-in-cheek choreographic word painting to a tale about a postman who brings a woman a bad-news letter.

In *New Love Song Waltzes*, a complex group work to Brahms's "Neue Liebeslieder Walzer," waves of dancers cross the stage in sweeps of movement, while smaller groups make specific points about contemporary love. A man lifts and carries a woman, while two other men perform similar lifts; the man being lifted yearns gently after the woman—a witty examination of the interplay between hetero- and homosexuality. Elsewhere, the dancers lie on the floor, arms and legs flung over one another, stirring restlessly like unquiet, anxious lovers. Morris has costumed his dance about current mores and "new love" in black and blue, the color of bruises. ■