

This Pillow Isn't Something To Sleep On

By Deborah Jowitt

PILLOW PARADE. At Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Becket, Massachusetts (July 19 to 23). Jacob's Pillow Ballet and Jazz Ensembles in Mark Morris's *Ponchielliana*, Benjamin Harkavy's *Pillow Sonata*, Ronn Forella's *Black on Black*, Lynn Simonson's *Big Band, Blues and Be-Bop*, Marta Renzi and Dancers in *What Practice Makes*; Teodoro Morca.

"What's everyone laughing at?" says a man behind me, bewildered. This is what I like about Mark Morris's *Ponchielliana*: it can make half the Jacob's Pillow audience—the half that knows a dance style well enough to recognize a satire—giggle and snort, and still show the rest of the people lovely dancing and bright choreography.

Morris's piece is one of four designed to challenge and display this summer's student dancers—25 concentrating on ballet, 25 on jazz, all chosen by audition. Charles Schoonmaker has dressed the men in tights and romantically blousy shirts, the women in pale, filmy little dresses of the sort favored for "pretty" ballets today. But Morris has drawn some of his ideas from the second half of the 19th century, when Ponchielli flourished, and earlier. The very first image, as I remember, is of a group of nymphs carrying one of their number aloft in a delicate hover all across the stage, while two others chase confusedly in and out of the wings (maybe that's later) or flurry on to dance and then think better of it. That's the kind of thing that provokes the laughter, or women crisscrossing the stage in diagonal lines of soft, swift pas de chats—so many of them that they begin to seem absurd.

But the steps are fluent and attractive, the groupings novel, the dancing a tide that deposits a complex and surprising array of brief solos, trios, duets. The steps (the women are not on pointe) are the sort that show the students *dancing*, rather than posing, and Morris has drawn fine performances from all of them, without a hint of "this is supposed to be funny" manners.