

Dance/Tobi Tobias

GLAD TIDINGS

"...From the Ailey troupe, unquenchable good humor, sophisticated flair. From young Mark Morris, energy and originality. . ."

Mark Morris IS JUST WHAT A YOUNG choreographer should be: original, energetic, and unpretentious. A few of the dances he showed on his recent programs at D.T.W.'s Bessie Schönberg Theater misfired or didn't amount to much, but the good ones reflected a talent of considerable promise.

Celestial Greetings, to raucous Thai music, has six vigorous women stepping briskly in movement that is natural, forthright, and friendly. They link up as in children's games—pairs clasping arms, facing one another in two lines—or shoulder-to-shoulder with arms crossed behind them, pert as the cygnets

in *Swan Lake*. The dance is disarmingly simple at first; its complications sneak up on you. The action grows more strenuous, though it never destroys the sunny, playful mood. Keeping their casual, pedestrian air, pretending it's only a game of follow-the-leader, the women hurl themselves into the space, arms cleaving the air, turn aloft, and tumble to the floor, still spinning. Suddenly they look like virtuosi.

Using the same carefree language and style, Morris tackles a big Romantic work—the Brahms song cycle Balanchine used for his exquisite *Liebeslieder Walzer*. You'd think the opulent music would bury Morris, but somehow he's equal to it, and in no way quelled by the existence of a masterpiece set to the same score. His ten dancers—a throng on the Schönberg stage—are glamorous in simple outfits of black and dusky blue, and the women sport rhinestone earrings, the signature accessory of Balanchine's girls. Sometimes we have the whole group plunging into the space, churning up the air like a bevy of gymnasts, or, hands clasped, sweetly weaving their way through intricate human chains. More often, the small community separates into duos, trios, quartets, one cluster dancing while the others look on benignly.

Although Morris's choreography has a decided athletic bent, the tenderness of the music is not forgotten. Loving couples—as often as not of the same sex—lift and cradle one another's bodies or roll on the floor in one another's arms, in a dream of languid pleasure. There is a great deal of invention here, but none of it clamors for attention. Indeed, the charm of the work lies in the fact that as the dancers do one lovely, astonishing thing after another, they come to look more and more like real people.

Another piece, *Dogtown*, to five harsh songs by Yoko Ono, turns the same people into unthinkable creatures—with animal movements and animal instincts, and human sensibilities. Or perhaps it is just real people again, seen through the dark prism. A line of crawling figures gropes its way down a long diagonal, stopping, waiting, inching forward, then halting again; rising, crouching, falling again. Meanwhile, a single figure lies splayed on the outskirts of the space, once or twice laboring to lift itself a couple of inches. A male and a female mate, on all fours; a second couple fight savagely, the woman whirling with the man wrapped around her waist, then flinging him away; three other beings huddle in the background, shielding their heads. The dance makes its brutal impact entirely through visual imagery and a sheerly physical sense of struggle. There is, amazingly, not a drop of angst in it.