

# A triumphant return for Seattle dancer

Mark Morris Dance Group, 8 p.m. today through Sunday, Washington Hall Performance Gallery (\$5-\$7; 632-6494).

by Carole Beers  
Times dance critic

Remember the name: Mark Morris. The Seattle native, who enjoyed a decade's sojourn with New York ballet and modern troupes including one of his own, has returned in triumph, presenting his Mark Morris Dance Group in a local premiere before a cheering audience last night at Washington Hall.

If Seattle wasn't aware that a capital-letter Dance Talent has

taken root and begun bearing original and abundant fruit, it knows now.

Having gathered to himself a quintet of stylist, chamber musicians and eight dancers of varying experience, much of it good, Morris showed that his dancing, teaching and choreographing ideas and skills are on par with the best. They are grounded in technique, and they are captivating at many levels.

All the works last night were new. They also were fresh, and often delivered in a deceptively offhand manner that veiled but did not obscure their intelligent conception.



Mark Morris is home from New York.

Peter Liddell / Seattle Times

The group opened with "My Party," a silly romp for mixed couples in *declassé* prom duds. Moving through the four parts of Jean Francaix's score, they tangoed, did Balkan-style line dancing and occasionally dropped to the floor to engage in a little freestyle "sex."

You wouldn't need to know Morris' background to see his ballet, folk, modern-dance references flying thick and fast, along with his typical "comments" on accepted manners and sexual pairing.

Next came "Prelude and Prelude," to music by Henry Cowell — played, as in all the works, by musicians on the raised stage at the back of the dance floor. Dancers manipulated foil fans up, down, around and held in their mouth as they did extensions, arabesques and languid circles. They repeated many moves, this time with a woman solo as others did a Greek chorus number in a line to one side. Among the soloist's feats: slow-motion, break-dance "baby rolls."

In "Love, You Have Won," Morris and Guillermo Resto danced a lazy, foppish duet to a cloying Vivaldi cantata, and milked the brow-smiting Renaissance mannerisms for all they were worth, now and again marking the end of a phrase with a flamenco STAMP! Their demeanor was limpid, but their underlying technique was nothing short of virtuoso — as was soprano Nancy Zylstra's singing, Randall McCarty's harpsichord playing, Page Smith-Weaver's cello work.

"She Came From There," to music by Erno Dohanyi, showed off Morris' serious side, as a tall, barefoot ballerina (Lodi McClellan) tried to "teach" clomping, slumping beasts (ballet students? Philistines?) the finer side of life — as in art. No dice. But they went through a fascinating, Chinese-acrobat process trying to learn.

My only quarrel with these pieces is that the dancers could have been sharper, more finished, together when doing true unison work, aware of presentation. The unpolished look may be intentional. But it strikes a false note in works otherwise made with so much care.