

N&O photos by Chris Seward

Choreographer Mark Morris, shown here with dancers Penny Hutchinson and Erin Matthiessen, is bright, talented, original and off the wall. He's in residence at the American Dance Festival brewing a work likely to be 'like nothing else in dance.'



By KAREN FISHER
 Staff Writer

DURHAM — Talent and tenacity. That's what it takes to be a young choreographer at the American Dance Festival, says ADF Associate Director Stephanie Reinhart. And that's what Mark Morris has got. Arlene Croce of *The New Yorker* says, "The Mark Morris experience is like nothing else in dance." Talent. While other dancers moonlighted as waiters and hash-slingers, Morris, 27, has been living on his dancing and choreography since he was 19. Tenacity.

Morris is one of three young choreographers commissioned to do a collaborative work with a young composer for the American Dance Festival. He and Herschel Garfein, 26, are working on a 20-minute performance to be presented at 8 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday in Reynolds Theater at Duke University.

The festival, Morris says, is "definitely one of the few places that produces untested new work. You know, like for us to collaborate is very risky. I know Herschel's music's great. I think my dances are great. I trust us enough that we'll come up with something."

How? "We drink beer and talk," Morris says, laughing. "We listen and watch each other's work. We're working parallel, but it's not that I make up a step and then he makes up a note. We're covering a concept that blankets the whole piece. So we talk mostly about just ideas."

The Young Choreographers and Composers in Residence program started as a workshop in 1978, Ms. Reinhart says. It was a process-oriented program, to give young choreographers and composers a chance to explore music and dance, but not to produce a finished product. Three years ago, the program was redesigned to work with higher-level artists.

Under the new program the ADF commissions a work that will be performed as part of the festival's season. Mark Morris was chosen because of his talent and potential, Ms. Reinhart says. "There were already indications that he has made contributions to the field."

Morris, who has never collaborated with a composer before, chose Garfein by listening to tapes of his music. "I didn't meet him until I got here and I am very pleased with how it's been working out because we have a lot of interests in common."

Garfein, of Boston, Mass., says he appreciates Morris' knowledge of music. "Mark is very musical. He really understands music, unlike a lot of choreographers. He can look at a score and understand what it means," Garfein says. "I can depend on his musicality."

Morris explains, "I have certain rhythmic keys that I'm using within the piece that he's also writing on, but they won't necessarily happen at the same time. We're working on a lot of the same principles. He comes up with some, I come up with some, but it doesn't mean that they're going to



The Morris experience

match up the way they would conventionally."

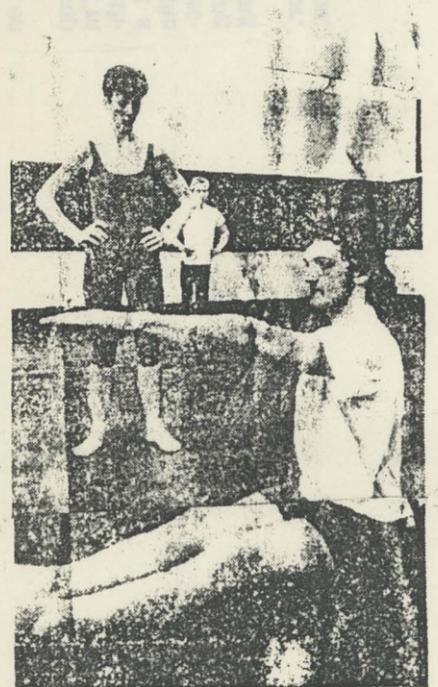
Garfein and Morris work well together, but they don't match up conventionally either. Garfein is clean-cut, preppy, dresses in khaki shorts and white T-shirt. Studied at Yale, the New England Conservatory, M.I.T. Morris is off-the-wall, smokes

Indonesian clove cigarettes, wears his curly dark locks in a small ponytail. Left high school a year early, ran around Europe, studied dance in Madrid.

But Morris also drinks Budweiser, calls his dance jobs "gigs" and wears plain red gym shorts. He has composed dances to South Indian religious

music, Brahms and country-western. He's created dances by the rules and broken all of them. Mark Morris is not predictable.

"I've been accused of eclecticism, but there are worse things," Morris says. Writers for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and *New York* magazine have called his dances



original, energetic, unpretentious, athletic, tender, parodic, androgynous, flippant, physical, energetic, dynamic, precocious, spellbinding.

Morris says it's "just dancing."

He says his style is based on a lot of things, including the modern dance of Doris Humphrey and principles of some ethnic dances. "It's definitely contemporary. I mean, it's happening right now. I'm making it up. I don't call it any particular school of thought that way. I call it a lot of them."

Morris got his start in dance at age 9, in flamenco. Jose Greco's Spanish company played his hometown, Seattle. He wanted to do what they were doing.

From flamenco he went to folk dancing for fun. He got his first job at 14, with a semi-professional Seattle company that did Balkan dance. He also began studying ballet.

"I left high school a year early because I hated it, and I was dapping all the time," he says. "So I spent 10 months in Europe, first of all just traveling around like people do when they go to Europe and they're teenagers. And then, the second five months, I studied in Madrid, to try to decide if I actually wanted to live there, because I don't believe in Spanish dancers that come back to the States. I decided that (staying) was out of the question, just because Franco was still there and it was a mess."

He came back, spent a year training in Seattle, then moved to New York in 1976 at age 19. "I got a job a couple of weeks later. I was surprised."

The job was with the Eliot Feld Ballet. From there, he went on to dance with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, the Hannah Kahn Dance

See MORRIS, page 4E

Morris experience is 'like no thing else in dance'

Continued from page 1E

Company, the Laura Dean Dancers and Musicians and did free-lance work with Kathryn Posin and Twyla Tharp.

He started presenting his own work in 1980. His first concert was at the Cunningham Studio in New York. "I'd been making up work for a long time, just choreographing, just to do it. I always wanted to make up dances. But this was the first time I actually presented in concert — just my work."

Since then, he has been produced and supported as the Mark Morris Dance Group by Dance Theatre Workshop in New York. The group includes dancers Morris, Penny Hutchinson, 30, Erin Matthiessen, 34, and Guillermo (Dee Dee) Resto, 30.

Morris sits on the edge of a straight-backed chair in a steamy rehearsal room at Duke. He wraps a white towel behind his neck like an athlete, across his chin like a bandit, over his head like a shepherd. He smiles constantly, makes the dancers laugh. Only his tired, red-rimmed, blue eyes betray that he is working.

"Easily. Up Dee Dee. Oh, uh oh! Up, down, swim, swim. Don't straighten your arms — ever. All together now. This is my favorite part. Good. Yeah. Watch out! Soften your chests. Side, over, under. Side, under, over.

"One more time. That's it. Sharper Dee Dee. See Erin, you're waiting extra. Just keep going — I'll fix it. That's it. Good timing. Take a break."

Ms. Hutchinson, Matthiessen and Resto relax, move toward the door and the water fountain. Morris follows them, his feet leaving small puddles of sweat on the hard wood floor.

"I do solo works and I do group works that I'm not in. Lately I'm putting them a little closer together," Morris says. "I just did a duet with Dee Dee. That was the first time I've really choreographed myself into something with someone else. And I'm going to be in this piece."

The dancers return to the floor. He works with Ms. Hutchinson,

then Resto, then Matthiessen, then all three together.

"This dance is nothing but rules, very, very strict rules," Morris explains. "Penny, the only woman, can use only circles in her movement, curves. Dee Dee only uses undercurves. Instead of circles, he does curves on a diagonal. And Erin only uses straight lines. My part, which doesn't exist yet, is all diagonals. Also when we travel, we can only travel in those ways. I just made up so many rules on this, that I can only make up a dance with what's left."

Morris said that he did not really take into account that he was working with one woman and three men, except perhaps that Ms. Hutchinson's pattern is circular and Matthiessen's is straight. But then Resto's is curved, too. Instead, he based the dancers' patterns on their individual styles.

"I don't know," Morris says. "It's like so many choreographers, I mean especially from maybe 20 years ago, 15, 10 years ago, do work that is so, it's like boy-girl sitcom kind of situations, and I don't like that. You know, I resented having to dance that way, having to pretend I was a cavalier, which I'm not. So this is my chance to do something about that. It doesn't mean that everything has to be a gay political statement. It just means that my work is definitely colored by that."

After rehearsal, Morris walks across Duke's East Campus back to the dorm room that is home for

a month. Two single mattresses on the floor, a desk, some shelves. He pulls a bedspread off one of the mattresses, strips behind it and wraps it around his waist and legs like a dhoti. He pops open another Budweiser and lights a clove cigarette.

"I've always had dance-related jobs," Morris says. "You know, I've taught a lot, and I choreograph commissions or I dance with companies or I guess the farthest thing away was modeling for art classes. But this is the first time I have been to a point where I can just live off my own work."

He was paid \$4,000 for his month at the ADF. About \$2,000 went to travel expenses for him and his dancers. That leaves \$100 a week salary for each of them.

After the festival, he will tie up some loose ends in New York, then do five weeks at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, similar to ADF, in Massachusetts. Ms. Hutchinson will travel to Jacob's Pillow with him, to assist and teach. After that, it's home to Seattle for a month, then back to New York to do the Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Series.

"You wouldn't want your children to grow up to be choreographers — or you wouldn't want to marry a choreographer, because they travel all the time. And I get totally obsessed," Morris says,

but adds, "I mean, I'm doing what I want. It's allowed me a great deal of freedom."

Morris only recently moved from New York back to Seattle. He works with dancers in both places. "I don't want to be in New York," he says. "I hate it. It's filthy. I hate the climate. I don't like the way you have to live there. Cumbersome. It's complicated. (In Seattle) I have a little house and a cat and a yard that I have to mow. I just feel like my life is less — well, it's more specialized by what I do, but it's less specialized in the way that I have to live. I can have neighbors and stuff. In New York, you don't have neighbors."

Ms. Hutchinson and Matthiessen also live in Seattle; Resto lives in New York. All three say they'd rather work with Morris than anyone else.

There are a lot of young, talented choreographers, Matthiessen says, but Morris is "the most knowledgeable choreographer that I know at his level right now."

Mark is someone who is really sincere about what he does — and honest."

Ms. Hutchinson, who has worked with Morris 12 years, agrees. "He's sensible, down to earth," she says. "He doesn't just get out in an artistic void too much. He knows what's sort of important, and he doesn't waste time with things that aren't important. I think he's very talented. I think he understands structure and people very well."

Resto adds, "I love the man. I love his work. I like getting drunk

with him. He's the best."

(Works by the Young Choreographers and Composers in Residence will be performed at 8 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday in Reynolds Theater, Bryan University Center, Duke University. The dance concert includes work by Mark Morris, choreographer, with Herschel Garfein, composer; Pooh Kaye, choreographer, with Michael Kosch, composer and Stephanie Skura, choreographer, with Frank McCarty, composer. Tickets are \$8.50.)