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PESSIMISTS WHO ANNOUNCED THAT THE line of great modern-dance choreographers had ended with Paul Taylor



Morris dancing: An exuberant talent.

have been shown up in the last few years by the work of **Mark Morris**, who is just under 30 and a big talent. The dances he presented recently in the Brooklyn Academy of Music's "Next Wave" series are characterized by his usual musical and structural intelligence and by his still-exuberant willingness to go out, if the pun may be forgiven, on a limb.

A twenty-minute solo to vocal music by Sri Tyagaraja, called *O Rangasayee*, consists of a hypnotic repetition of simple phrases suggested by Indian dance, played out first on a line straight to the

audience, next on the diagonal, then in circles and figure eights, the movement loosening and growing wilder as the dance progresses, until it is just barely in control. Dressed in a pale loincloth, hands and feet rouged in the manner of Middle Eastern dancers, Morris, a large-boned, fleshy man with shoulder-length chestnut curls, looks like an androgynous god. His message seems to be about the nature of performance itself—how, though a dance may be exhibited for an audience, it is at heart a private matter, a means by which the dancer discovers his soul.

A newly revised group work, *Gloria*, conveys the spiritual ecstasy of the Vivaldi choral work to which it is set, although the raw material of the dance is profoundly earthbound rather than celestial. The emphasis, as in the folk dancing that formed an important part of Morris's training and inspiration, is on the dancers' weight and groundedness. Prone figures inch painfully along the floor, rise only to fall, walk as spastically as robots. Freed from these restrictions, they assault the space with buoyant but rough-hewn leaps and survey the air with their arms, hands waving like triumphant banners. There's a marvelous sense of community here—another trait Morris adopted from folk dance; you feel you are watching a hitherto undiscovered tribe, grieving and celebrating in a religious ritual that mysteriously echoes our own.

In *Championship Wrestling After Roland Barthes*, to Herschel Garfein's electronic score with wrestling-match voice-over, Morris turns his company into mean, burly strongmen and -women who murderously twist one another into submission. As in most of Morris's work, women are treated as the physical equals of men, even in matters of brute force. The piece opens with a full-bodied female straddling the ground like a Titan and flexing her biceps, while Teri Weksler, the smallest, most fragile-looking of the women in the group, calmly takes her turn at lugging around—and even flooring—a hefty opponent. Most of the material is terrifyingly realistic, from the pretzled clinches to the slamming of bodies into the floor. It's hard to describe how movement and intentions that are so ugly can become beautiful,

objects of contemplation, but that's just what happens. The piece has its right-minded moral about violence, and its moments of absurd humor, but it is most interesting when it makes hideous grapplings look like a sculpture by Rodin.

Photograph by Beatriz Schiller.