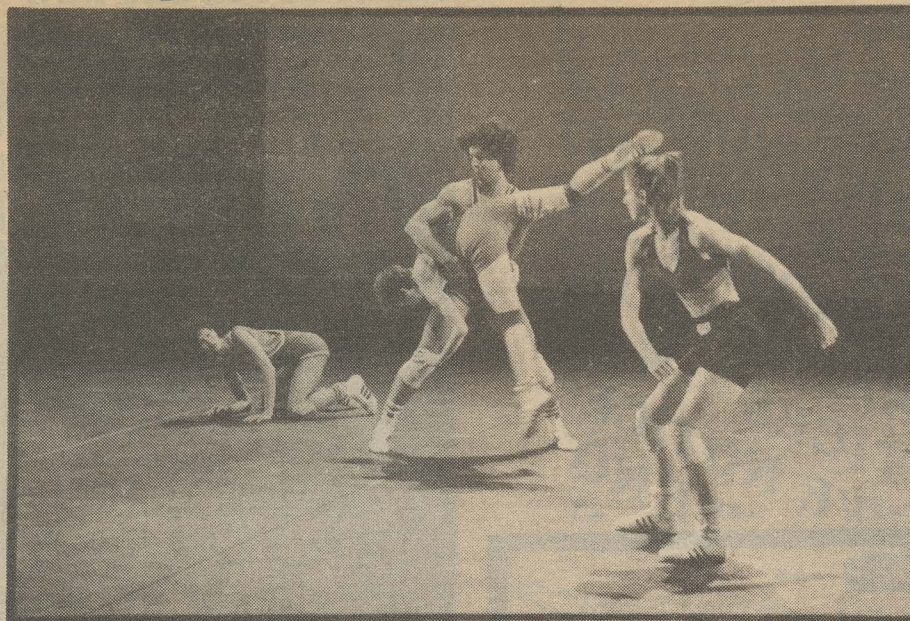


Gorgeous Hunks



Tom Brazil

by Tom Brazil

Gloria, O Rangasayee, Championship Wrestling After Roland Barthes
Mark Morris Dance Group
Brooklyn Academy of Music
Next Wave Festival
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Talk about your Great (Gay) White Hope! Just about everybody in the New York dance world came out to Brooklyn to see the Next Wave performances of the much-touted Mark Morris—who came out as a “gay artist” to the whole dance world in December’s *Dance Magazine*, in a pull-out, no less, which will be distributed free to all “dance lovers” in this, Nutcracker Month. None of the three dances on his program can be labeled “gay

choreography,” by their subject matter or their choreographic style; but there is no mistaking that Morris is a serious choreographer with an up-front gay sensibility.

The performance opened gloriously with *Gloria* set to Vivaldi’s *Gloria in D*. There is throughout the dance a moving towards, a reaching upwards, a rising into the light, that grows to symbolize a patient, enduring hopefulness. There is a joyfulness in physicality expressed as much in rolling down onto the floor and up again as in its airborne, bent-leg leaps. There’s a delight in interrupting repetition with inventive variations that’s almost, in this very serious dance, witty. Above all, there is in *Gloria* an unmistakable love for Vivaldi’s wonderful music.

In his solo, *O Rangasayee*, set to traditional Indian music by Sri Tyagaraja,

Morris wears a draped loincloth that could also be described as a diaper. It’s puzzling and unsettling, as is Morris’s naked earthy maleness combined with his pretty features and his abundant curly ringlets. But more than only physically, in this dance and in his other solos, Morris takes on a spiritual androgyny that inevitably commands attention and respect. The way he flips his hair, his hand gestures, his attitudes are all at times feminine, yet his seriousness saves the dance from ever seeming camp. Being always aware that the possibility of falling in-to campiness is only a slip away is part of the fascination of the dance. Aside from these considerations, *O Rangasayee* demonstrates Morris’s formidable strength and control as a dancer.

The surprise of the program was *Championship Wrestling After Roland Barthes*. (“Not a dance,” my companion remarked afterwards. “Oh yeah,” I thought.) First of all, Morris costumes the company in wrestler drag. Bare chests and bulging biceps galore! Then he puts the dancers to striking, spotlight muscle poses—and some of these “champions” are to die for. Not just the men; the women “wrestlers” are gorgeous hunks too. The unforgettable center section divides the dancers into two opposing groups, with one of each team acting as “striking force,” carried, supported, and manipulated by the others. The image reminded me of jousting knights on skirted horses; the jerky slow motion and the crisp, bright primary colors of the costumes brought Japanese mechanical toys to mind.

Here, as in Morris’s 1982 *New Love Song Waltzes*, the inclusion of same-sex partnering and emotional exchanges is a given, though ironically this brightly costumed and lit dance is about a darker side of coupling than the lyric, lovely, moodily lit *Waltzes*, yet it surprisingly works in *Championship Wrestling* to make each of the dancers individually interesting. ■