

Wunderkind of dance

By SHARON BASCO

THEY'RE raving about Mark Morris in New York. In London, audiences howl and cheer at his concerts.

New Yorker magazine dance critic Arlene Croce singled him out as "one of the world's marvelous dancers," and Dance Magazine dubbed Morris, "the most promising of his generation."

Morris is, in short, the hottest choreographer going. (He will show his work tomorrow and Saturday nights at the Boston Shakespeare Company.)

Thus, it was with no small trepidation that I prepared to serve him tea earlier this week in my humble Cambridge living room.

"Hey, I like that," exclaimed the blue-eyed young man in long black ringlets, peering into an adjacent sunroom. Mark Morris likes sunshine and flowers.

"And wow, I love blackberry tea... I think," he said. He even liked the spoon I gave him to pry honey out of a jar. It was immediately clear that this was not going to be one of those throat-grabbing interviews in which the intense artist lets his eyes travel to the ceiling as he composes a terse and cerebral reply, something perhaps appropriate for carving in stone.

The 28-year-old "Modern with a capital 'M,'" dance-maker spoke with candor and wit about his success, Twyla Tharp's work (he publicly booed a concert of hers), his own homosexuality, what his work looks like and insanity.

Since insanity is a word one might attach to the notion of a neophyte booing an accepted master's work, we begin there.

"I think Tharp is a great choreographer," said Morris, who danced briefly with her company (as with those of Lar Lubovitch and Laura Dean). "But her work has gotten mean-spirited. And condescending. And unnecessarily sexually violent.

"It's not illuminating anything important. The last concert of hers I saw, her dances were like this," Morris crushed his thumb into a glass table, "to the audience. So I booed. First I screamed, 'No more rape!' be-



MARK MORRIS: 'Most promising of his generation'

cause it was so ugly and horrible.

"Liz Thompson [director of Jacob's Pillow] assured me it was an enormous career mistake," Morris grinned.

His opinions about Tharp typify his thoughts on the grand and glittery aspects of the dance world he rejected when he left New York. He calls much of post-modern dance "boring," and desperately seeks to avoid the traps of egotism and commercialism to which he thinks Tharp and others have succumbed.

"If Twyla Tharp is the pinnacle of the profession," Morris said, "then I'm going to be a word processor. If that's what I have to look forward to, then I'd rather just stop right now."

By making a move back to his hometown of Seattle last year, after six or seven years in New York, Morris is making a down-to-earth choice in habitat that seems much in keeping with his unusually practical outlook.

"I've seen just about every choreographer go slightly

crazy," he said. "But I don't want to test out my potential for craziness. This is not a realistic profession, and I am trying to carve out a realistic life."

His lifestyle, however, is not conventional.

"I say that right out loud that I am a gay artist. And that is not because I want all the cute boys in the audience to send me a note backstage," Morris said. "I just think that it's important for me to say that, because it is a fact. You might recognize that from my work, too.

"I'm a romantic, deep down. Romance and drama mean something to me. And I like musical interpretation. I can't expect people to like a dance that doesn't have meaning or resonance.

"You know, if a work is just pure design, it had better be a pretty good design. No matter how pure your dance is, you still have to make something happen."

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