



Ecstatic, meditative, and wildly
theatrical, choreographer Mark Morris
upends the canons of Minimalism...
and breathes new life into dance

We've had twenty years of Minimalist avant-garde, generally called Post-Modern, dance, and now something else is happening that doesn't even have a name—a thaw, a bloom, a lyric kineticization. Mark Morris, a choreographer who prefers to live in his native Seattle and only visit New York, is the most self-assured of the young voluptuaries come to challenge the long austerity. When he came into view with the Mark Morris Dance Group three years ago at New York City's Dance Theater Workshop, he already showed an easy, flowing musicality along with a striking stylistic range. (A satire of junior high called "Études Modernes" on the same (Continued)

mark morris

breaking away

(Continued) program with an impassioned ensemble work set to Brahms!) The only question: was he just being superbly clever or was he doing something new?

The answer came in Morris' twenty-minute solo, "O Rangasayee," in his winter 1984 concert at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. His torso bare except for a Gandhi-like diaper, his palms and bare soles tinted red, his shoulder-length curls loose, Morris evoked a hitherto unknown blend of the exquisite and the sturdy. And as the dance wound itself out on the skein of an Indian raga, offering a series of perfumed, Fokinesque postures, spiraling again and again into a head-wagging strut, whirling around the stage in a cascade of turns, drawing back on itself in slow-motion grimaces, it resolved into something audiences don't usually see on the avant-garde stage—an intimate meditation on a subject close to the choreographer. In this case, it was the imaginative élan of the recent hippy vagabond romance with the East.

Such free-form eccentricity doesn't fit among the theories and methods of avant-garde dance-making. But Morris isn't just a confessional artist come to soften a doctrine-stiffened art form: he is interested in something bigger—a new, more pliant formalism. The other tour de force on the BAM program was about a subject entirely removed from Morris' or his dancers' personal experience—wrestling. "Championship Wrestling After Roland Barthes" explored the gestures of this "sport" with its built-in, lurid theatricality. The dancers, both men and women, swaggered around, thwoned each other against the floor, flashed victory signs to the audience, engaged in extended, slow-motion bouts of brutality. Through the comic, cathartic content of the dance, however, could be read its serious intentions. It was not only a homage to Barthes's idea that the ancient rituals of theater survive in modern popular wrestling, it was also Morris' witty attempt to put these rituals on his own stage, to reclaim a theatrical medium for his dances.

The 'sixties avant-garde and its progeny always said theater in dance meant trickery—elitist, decadent, pious, pretty trickery. Minimal dance was plainer, and so more truthful. Why? says Morris, supported by Roland Barthes, his own instincts and his own talents. Isn't illusion—both the personal and social brands of it—a better way to get at truth? This is a question that Post-Modern artists in art, architecture, music, and fiction are asking. Morris has luckily brought it to dance.

—Elizabeth Kendall

one serious

Judy Davis is small, chic, and self-effacing.

But her brilliant career speaks for itself.

Now the smoldering star of *A Passage to India* wants to play a "bad journalist"

BY MARY CANTWELL

In the days when actors' names were changed to mirror their images, Judy Davis would have been rechristened. Judys are perky. Judys have tip-tilted noses and bouncy breasts, and they walk as if their shoes encased mattress springs. But Judy Davis is a small, thin woman with a small, silent face who speaks in tones that have the listener remembering that a low voice is an excellent thing in a woman. She is also chic, which actresses, Judys or otherwise, rarely are; and when she walked into a New York restaurant one day last December several people turned to stare. It was not that they knew her face—*A Passage to India*, in which she is Forster's "queer, cautious" Adela Quested, had only just opened—but that she looked like she'd just left the *Mauretania*. Black hat, grey dress, black coat: Mrs. Ernest Simpson would have been happy in such a getup.

Judy Davis, who is "nearly thirty," is from Perth, a small city on the west coast of Australia. Like what seems to be an inordinate number of Australians, she wanted to be an actor, and traveled east to Sydney and the National Institute of Dramatic Art. "I saw my career in very long terms," she says. "I was going to build it up brick by brick." The first brick, however, was boulder-sized: not long after graduation she was picked for the lead in *My Brilliant Career*.

My Brilliant Career is a high-spirited film about a high-spirited young Australian who wants to be a writer. Writers seldom choose to write while sitting in trees with kittens in their laps, as one scene has it, and more than a few critics pointed that out, but Judy Davis was hailed as a young Katharine Hepburn. Now, according to at least one review of *A Passage to India*, she is a young Glenda Jackson. Miss Davis rejects both compliments. "What is the point of comparing actors and actresses? It's so silly."

Between *Career* and *Passages*, Miss Davis resumed bricklaying: "While you're learning your craft, you want to do it in the quietest way possible." Her films were small and forgettable, although she cherishes *Winter of Our Dreams*, in which she was a Sydney hooker. She also did theater, in Australia and London, and this fall performed in Sydney in *King Lear*, playing Cordelia and the Fool. "What a boring role that is, Cordelia. But the Fool, fantastic!" She also played the young Golda Meir in the TV production in which Ingrid Bergman played the old G.M. "I haven't worked out for myself just how far I want to extend the boundaries, but I thought, 'Why not?'" One suspects Miss Bergman may have thought the same thing.

Married to a Scotland-born Australian actor, Miss Davis wonders whether they should live in London, because "it's such a good place for actors." She thinks it would be interesting to play a journalist, "a bad journalist." (That she dislikes being interviewed may be contributory.) She would have liked to work with Ingmar Bergman. "I would have kissed his feet. I would have ironed his clothes." She wouldn't mind essaying John Webster and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

"How wonderful it must be," says her luncheon companion, suddenly remembering another Webster, "to have lines like 'Call for the robin redbreast and the wren. . .'" "Oh yes," replies the very serious, very talented Judy Davis, "it's a privilege."

PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT...

