

who seem at present to be some sort of roadmarks along the direction in which the company is currently heading. Heather Watts' major performances were in the Martins Schubertiad and the revival of Balanchine's Bugaku, for which, I am convinced, she was the reason. In the Martins, she was vague and beautiful but unchallenged. In the Balanchine, she was megavoltage. Bugaku was created for Allegra Kent and that is asking a lot of any successor. Watts is right on top of it – in some cases, more literally than one might care to see. Her expansive and angular body accommodates itself to every kink in Balanchine's free fantasy on Japan and her genuinely exotic performance approaches the ground where the ethnic becomes the mythic. Kyra Nichols was featured in three roles created for her (note that none are by Balanchine) – in Robbins' Spring variation in The Four Seasons, in the first ballerina role of Tomasson's Menuetto, and in Martin's Schubertiad. I will spare you the details of what this ballerina can do technically. Maybe a lexicon could explain it. But for all her technical accomplishment, Nichols is never the sum of her steps. She is a dancer in the presentation of music and choreography and as such transcends technical totalitarianism. Maria Calegari, who virtually dominated the season, does the same simply by walking on stage. If repertory is indeed destiny, she is heading for the throne.

Be Sure to Mark Morris

The Mark Morris Dance Company at the Brooklyn Academy

Dancer/choreographer Mark Morris is twenty-eight years old, lives and works in Seattle, and is the new Boy Wonder. After a varied apprenticeship in a gaggle of modern companies – among others, Hannah Kahn, Eliot Feld, Laura Dean and, although he does not list her in his program biography, Twyla Tharp – Morris finally settled in his native Seattle, formed his own troupe and gave the first performance of the small Mark Morris Dance Company at the Cunningham Dance Studio in 1980. In 1984, you couldn't steal a ticket.

Big deal, right? When was the last time anyone could trust anyone else's trendiest trend and when is any degree of blind trust not at least slightly suspect anyway? (Witness the American reactions to Pina Bausch and the German reaction to Twyla Tharp.) But, on the basis of the program Morris and his dancers recently staged in Brooklyn – two works for his company and one for himself – I take up the rear guard of the bandwagon. Most appropriately, Mark Morris' choreography is unique.

The emotional nature of my reaction is, I think, a key in the Morris phenomenon. Granted, Morris' technical base as a choreographer is precise and vivid and wildly imaginative. He is a pasticher in the epic manner and the strokes he draws together from almost every major choreographer exhibit not only intelligence and research but exception-

nally good taste. There's rarely a dull moment in that regard.

But what marks Morris as exceptional is his ability to fuse these technical elements to emotional responses that are as judicious in their honesty as they are joyful. You don't have to feel silly for having such a good time. The visual stimuli bridge the emotional synapse and generate positive sensations that feel right because, I suggest, they are so honest. Even when Morris is feeding us emotional truths about ourselves and our environment that we really don't want to face, he makes them visually palatable. It's a gift. In that respect, Morris achieves a kind of accessibility or universality that, I also suggest, Bausch, the Daughter of Despair, was not able to communicate to the Americans and which the High Priestess of Hope Twyla Tharp was not able to make viable for the Germans.

The opening work Gloria is set to Vivaldi's Gloria in D. The lights discover two dancers – a woman standing with her arms outstretched, palms out and down, and a man prone across the floor, his face up and pointed toward the audience – as they begin to inch their way down the stage. When they reach their goal, cut to black and extended hosannah. Morris has already stated his ground on time and technique and music. The unities will be preserved – of a fashion. The lights come up on the company in a slightly staggered single line, facing stage left, the first person stretched across the floor like the man in the opening section, the line gradually ascending to the last person, standing fully erect. Rob Besserer, tall and cool and blond and classically optimistic, begins a twisting adagio variation as the line begins to ooze across the floor. He concludes by slowly pirouetting to the floor as another dancer rises to begin a variation on this first variation. The line moves across the floor, spinning off parts of itself and then calling them back. We're into theme and Morris' observations on this central concern – the group, its life and survival and union – substantiate the solos and group dances as they build to an inevitably ecstatic climax. As rhythmic as he is unorthodox, Morris paints with both broad strokes and pointillist precision. The rhythms with which these vary are keyed to a narcotic inner rhythm that is alternately soothing and challenging. A musical inconsistency is occasionally disruptive, but when Morris does gear into the music – as he does in the extraordinary Miserère section – watch out. You're about to go for a powerful ride.

Morris' only dance appearance was a twenty-minute solo O Ranga-sayee to the music of Sri Tyagaraja. (Morris says that he listened to the music for three years before daring to choreograph to it.) His hands and feet painted red, his mane of curls pouring over his shoulders, and with only a white cloth covering his groin, Morris sets his feet on the deadliest choreographic terrain – the bridge which separates the West from the East. Oh, God, not another one. The happy difference is that Morris has found a path to that



Mark Morris; Mark Morris Dance Group, Photo © Barry Alterman

bridge which few have been given to follow. He has chosen interpretation and not portraiture and his dance is about rhythm. His exploration of those rhythms and their extension into movement – not vice versa – are not only brave (he does make a strange picture) but indicate his faith in his central tenet: the rhythm is all.

The program concluded with the world premiere of Championship Wrestling After Roland Barthes, an unfortunately self-conscious title for its most substantial work. His dancers are costumed in vivid variations of professional wrestling gear and the work is set to a commissioned score by Herschel Garfein – interspersed with sounds recorded at live wrestling matches. Morris' marathon metaphor classifies him as the Anne Beattie of the dance world. He has his finger right to the pulse of the time and he is telling us that, like it or not, fellas, this is the way it is. Times are hard. The work is a series of set pieces for the group (no interaction here) and the dancers simply move from one piece to another. There is

not a single duet. An inexorable rhythm is set in motion and moves to its inevitable conclusion. To those who decry its obviousness, I suggest that that is half the point. Morris realizes some terrific and terrifying images. The dancers line up against a harsh white background, their silhouettes posing and flexing. We are not only drawn to the cruelty inherent in narcissism but its immediate application to dance and dancers. Nothing is untainted. Two women are drawn – literally – through a wrestling match, the rest of the dancers moving them about like marionettes attempting to batter one another. The audience laughs at the slapstick and then exits onto the streets of Brooklyn at night. I only hazard a guess that Morris is maybe saying something we don't really want to hear so let's laugh about it instead, although these things are being said with cleverness and class. I am quite certain, however, that whatever Mark Morris wants heard eventually will be heard.

Otis Stuart