

A One-of-a-Kind Dance Phenomenon

BY KATE REGAN

Mark Morris dances like a happily demented dervish, and his choreography exudes such humor and frank physicality that it defies comparison with anything else in dance today. He and six members of his company are performing six new works through tomorrow at the New Performance Gallery, and this finale to the gallery's American Inroads series is a triumph.

Morris recently returned from New York — where he's been acclaimed as dance's new Golden Boy — to his home town of Seattle, where "my cat is happier." There are other changes: Morris no longer sports the long, curly locks that gave him an angelic, androgynous look. That role belongs now to Guillermo Resto, a powerfully built dancer with massive, jetty curls and haunted eyes, who performed with Morris in the evening's most deliriously enchanting work, "Love You Have Won."

Set to an exquisite recording of Vivaldi's cantata, "Amor, Hai Vinto," the duet presents Morris and Resto dressed alike in black knee britches and the sort of billowy white shirts sported by 17th-century rakes. Mincing and primping through fastidious ballet steps, miming lugubrious despair in response to Vivaldi's plaints, or dashing recklessly into complicated leaps, the two men upset every expectation and make a masterpiece of ambiguity.

For just when you think you're watching a pure parody — of concepts of "masculinity," of balletic precision and of romantic love — Morris and Resto pounce and slam through the air with such clarity and speed that the dance turns into a celebration. Like much of Morris' work, it's lushly physical and informed with wit; the effect is funny, moving and beautiful.

Morris' most celebrated piece in his New York performances probably was "O Rangasayee," a lyrical solo based on Indian dance

forms, which he does not perform in this San Francisco tour. In general, he does not emphasize his own remarkable virtuosity, appearing in only one solo, in addition to the duet and one of the group dances.

But Morris is more than a star; he has selected dancers of such strong, sinewy grace and personality that each is a specific pleasure to watch.

They threw themselves into "Lovey," a compendium of songs by the Violent Femmes which includes a hilarious, chilling enactment of "Country Death Song." Long, lanky Lodi McClellan, who dances like a lovestruck praying mantis, was outstanding here, along with the compact, laconic David Landis.

Morris emphasizes humor, with unsettling changes of physical and emotional pace, but what you notice most of all is his dancers' ability to veer from weighty, endearingly

awkward and powerful movement to gestures of split-second precision and delicacy. It's most apparent in "Songs That Tell a Story," in which Penny Hutchinson, Landis and Resto cavort through a series of country-western songs, and in "Celestial Greetings," a lyrical use of Thai music that combines Asian dance forms with the Virginia reel.

And finally there is Morris' unnerving, hilarious solo, "The Vacant Chair," in which he takes a patriotic song, a musical setting of Joyce Kilmer's infamous "Trees" and Carrie J. Bond's sickly sweet "When You Come to the End of a Perfect Day." Dressed only in Jockey shorts, Morris claws his way out of paper bag in the first number, mimes Kilmer's tree with a torso as contorted as the Elephant Man's, and clomps and staggers maniacally through that perfect day. It's all done with essential musicality and imagination; his phrasing never goes out of control.