

Mark Morris good start to fall dance season

By Karen Dacko

For The Pittsburgh Press

The curtain rose on the fall dance season last night with the Pittsburgh debut of the Seattle-based Mark Morris Dance Group. Presented by the Pittsburgh Dance Council, the innovative seven member company, offered six works, including the world premiere of "Jealousy."

Choreographed and performed by the prolific Morris, "Jealousy" unfolds slowly, as Morris, posed on the floor languidly uncurls his body and gradually rises. His initial movements are strong, distinctive arm gestures and facial expressions. His hands powerfully press against his torso and rise above his head in an expression of anxiety, perhaps wrought by the tortures of jealousy.

Set to "Jealousy," an excerpt from Handel's "Hercules," the choreography tends to concentrate on

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movements of the upper body, juxtaposing tensions, those implied by repetition of the initial arm and hand gestures with soft undulations of the wrists.

Morris, clad in red trousers, performed with intensity and determination, employing his dramatic sense and musicality to phrase his movements. The seriousness he projected in this piece, sharply contrasted with his humorous cavortings in "Love, You Have Won," a light, entertaining, pseudo-balletic romp.

The clever duet, for two men, dressed in 17th-century peasant attire, is choreographed to Vivaldi's "Cantata: Amor, Hai Vinto." The work happily plays with the music and teases with the movements. Mime gestures, as well as expres-

sive, amusing affectations wittily enliven the piece.

The choreography is intentionally non-technical, appearing much like unskilled ballet, with broken, clumsy lines, "turned-in" pirouettes and awkward voyages en arabesque.

One particularly engaging segment features the two men simultaneously and quite haphazardly executing the fouette combination found in "Medora's Variation" from "Corsaire Pas de Deux."

Morris's choreography demonstrates admirable versatility. Strikingly, all of the pieces on the program are strongly dissimilar, appealing to a variety of tastes. Although redundancy does not exist between the pieces, Morris does use repetition within the structure of his works, thematically employing series of steps. This is especially exemplified in "Celestial Greetings," set to popular Thai songs.

Although the music reflects a foreign culture, the work for six performers evokes a folk dance image.

Casually costumed in assorted colored T-shirts and pants of various lengths, the dancers begin in two lines, one downstage, one upstage. The lines join, forming partnerships, which proceed to explore the use of "weight," pull and shift.

Predominate patterning in the second portion of the piece resembles a relay race, with each dancer executing a solo passage. Here, Morris makes use of repetition, using the choreographic device to interpret the music. The flow of the movement, the thematic repetition of one particular weight-shift/lift combination and the simultaneous, synchronized ensemble passages, lends the interesting work an hypnotic quality.

"Songs That Tell a Story" is a serious piece, with moralistic overtones. Three performers, Penny Hutchinson, David Landis and Guillermo Resto, dance through four songs by "The Louvin Brothers." As in all of Morris's pieces, mime gestures are a major part of the choreography, propelling the action.

The mime, which depicts the lyrics of the tunes, is especially well-drawn in the "Robe of White" segment. Correspondingly, the dancers' movements aptly represent the grief felt in losing a loved one in war.

The choreography in "The Great Atomic Power" segment is strong. The dancers hurl themselves through space with forceful conviction. Again, a particular movement, in this case a jump, is used repeatedly, to literally drive the point into the audience's mind. The choreographic device and the overall effect of the segment is very effective.

"Lovey," the most disquieting work on the program, is rather bizarre, to say the least. Presented to five songs by The Violent Femmes, the piece sounds like a punk rock video, looks like a low budget horror film and feels like a very bad dream.

Four strangely attired dancers,

wearing an assortment of clothing accost each other, toss themselves through space, leer menacingly and convulse on the floor.

"Prelude and Prelude," which opened the performance, was also for an ensemble of six. The music, "Prelude Violin and Harpsichord" by Cowell, provided a haunting setting for the fan dance. Structured in two parts, the first portion features one female performer, exploring, probing through space, while a relatively static group mechanically lifted, lowered and turned hand-held blue fans.

During the second portion of the piece, the patterning reverses, the solo performer executing the fan sequence, while the ensemble moves. Costuming is minimal, dancers attired in leotards or just trunks.

Supported by the Mid-Atlantic States Arts Consortium and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Pittsburgh residency of the Mark Morris Dance Group will conclude with this evening's performance at 8. For ticket information, call the Pittsburgh Dance Council, 355-0330 or the Stephen Foster Memorial Theater, 624-4101.

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