

Section 2 SHOW

Mark Morris stirs up N.Y. dance world

*His modern troupe performs
at MoMing this Thursday*

DANCE / By Wynne Delacoma

With more than 100 New York City-based modern dance companies vying for attention, the Eastern dance press is a skeptical lot. Critics hoard their superlatives and are wary about announcing heirs apparent to the creative crowns worn by the likes of Martha Graham.

But Mark Morris, the 29-year-old Seattle-based dancer and choreographer, has been making as much of a stir on the dance scene as Bruce Springsteen did in his early days on the rock scene. Influential observers have hailed Morris's energetic, accessible work as the best hope for the future of modern dance. For a company based outside the sacred Hudson River boundary, this is no mean feat.

Morris brings his 10-member troupe to MoMing Dance & Arts Center Thursday in four performances co-sponsored by the National Performance Network. The program includes pieces set to music of J. S. Bach, Vivaldi and the Violent Femmes.

One day after returning from a two-week concert tour of Paris and London, Morris talked from New York about his fame and his work. He combined bouncing, boyish enthusiasm with the cool of an artist confident about his work.

"I wasn't totally surprised by the good critical reception," said Morris. "It was a compliment, and the amount of material that was generated was impressive [long reviews in the New Yorker and New York Times, a Dance Magazine feature] and flattering to some degree. . . . but there had been hints that it was coming."

Morris, who started out by studying flamenco dance in Seattle before turning to modern dance, first appeared in New York in 1980. He had moved to the city in the early 1970s and danced briefly with the Eliot Feld and Laura Dean troupes. He stayed longer with companies headed by Lar Lubovitch and Hannah Kahn before striking out on his own. His first concert, given when the company was only a few months old, was a big hit.

"It was great," he recalls. "It was mostly just friends and boyfriends of dancers. . . . But that's where I got work for the next year."

The work included appearances at the influential Dance Theater Workshop. Last season, Morris was part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's prestigious Next Wave Festival, putting him in the company of performers including Meredith Monk, and Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane. Some critics called Morris the best of the lot.

Morris declined to analyze why his dances are being praised, but he offered a hint.

"One thing, I work with a great group of dancers," he said. "They can take any piece of - - - I come up with and make it look better. And my work is watcha-



Mark Morris and his troupe will dance at MoMing starting tomorrow.

ble. I keep in mind that it will eventually wind up being visible to an audience. I don't do stuff just for myself. I'm working in theater; it's not just theoretical."

Morris's dances combine the sweep and long, surging line of Lubovitch's best work with a wit that is his own. Morris was a folk dancer at one time, and influences from Eastern European dance filter into his work. While on tour with Laura Dean, Morris became fascinated with Indian music, another sensibility that is subtly present in his dances.

Morris, who will teach master classes at MoMing, has taught at the University of Washington since returning to Seattle a few years ago.

"I make up a class as I go along," he said. "I like to make up material on the spot. It just sort of keeps me tuned."

His 1982 work, "Canonic 3/4 Studies" which will be danced at MoMing, was created in a Seattle dance workshop. "It was basically whoever stayed after class could be in the piece," Morris said.

The choreographer returned to Seattle for the simplest of reasons.

"I was in New York eight or nine years. I don't like living here very much. I like living in Seattle; it's beautiful. It's not that it can support me dance-wise very much, but I like living there. . . . But I have a lot of work and it's all over, so it's no different than living anywhere else. It also makes me like New York better when I come back."

The Mark Morris Dance Group performs at MoMing Dance & Arts Center, 1034 W. Barry, at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow and Sunday, and 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Call 472-9894 for information. Call 472-7662 for information about master classes.