



Mark Morris: Creating dances that set the floor pounding with energy, impudence and imagination.

Morris dancers a joy to behold

By Richard Christiansen
Entertainment editor

You can see right away why Mark Morris, making his Chicago debut this weekend at the MoMing Dance and Arts Center, has caused such a stir and a twitter in the dance world in the last few years.

Tousle-haired and boyish in appearance, the gifted young man [29] from Seattle is an engaging practitioner of gung-ho choreography, leading the 10 other barefoot dancers in his group in works that set the floor pounding with energy, impudence and imagination.

Ingenuous yet intricate, apparently free-form yet rooted in discipline, the high-spirited Morris pieces often seem to satirize the very art they celebrate. His movements begin almost nonchalantly, then work themselves up to great lunges and spins, almost as in a child's game. But his dances are truly balletic in that they consistently take their inspiration from the music, whether that music be Bach or punk rock.

Much of the time, Morris' flair for theatricality gives his dances an impish or even malevolent edge.

In his solo to a trio of American songs of sentiment, for example, he works against the treacly lyrics by appearing clad only in jockey shorts and a paper bag over his head. Having dispatched the first song, George Root's

Mark Morris Dance Group

A concert of dance choreographed by Mark Morris, with lighting by Phil Sandstrom. Opened Oct. 31 at the MoMing Dance and Arts Center, 1034 W. Berry Ave., and plays at 8:30 p.m. this Friday and Saturday and 7:30 p.m. Sunday. Length of performance, 1:50. Tickets are \$9, or \$8 for senior citizens and students. Group rates available. Phone 472-6894.

THE DANCERS

Mark Morris, Scott Cunningham, Ruth Davidson, Tina Fehlandt, Penny Hutchinson, David Landis, Donald Mouton, Guillermo Resto, Jennifer Thienes, Keith Sabado, Teri Weksler.

"The Vacant Chair," he tears off the bag, hunches down and starts to grow, bloom and wither to "Trees," Oscar Rasbach's setting of Joyce Kilmer's famous poem, then circles the stage in increasingly spastic starts as the recording of Carrie Jacobs Bond's "A Perfect Day" floats serenely over the sound system.

"Lovey," set to five songs by the Violent Femmes pop group, turns his dancers into frenzied punks dressed in slippers, pajamas, bathrobes and shorts who jerk, tremble and stab the air in between doing naughty deeds to plastic diapered dollies that they alternately cuddle and fling about.

"Love, You Have Won," a male duet danced by Morris and the curly-haired Guillermo Resto, takes off in antic exaggerations of the kind of courtly mime associated with its music, the cantata "Amor, Hai Vinto," by Antonio Vivaldi. In black tights and loose, white blouses, the men pair off in a ballet that, deftly sending up the baroque aria, maintains a

keen contemporary edge to its mannered movements.

"Marble Halls," which ends the program, is an exuberant, highly intelligent piece that slingshots the dancers on and off stage on a near collision course in its buoyant final movement. The dancers, in orange shorts and white tank tops, plunge headlong into Bach's Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C minor, hopping, spinning and running in ever-varied corps combinations. As with all master ballets, its movement, even the sudden falls to the floor, seem perfectly patterned from the music.

The program's peak, however, comes in its opening "Canonic 3/4 Studies," which is a delightful summary of Morris' antic ingenuity.

He starts it with a single dancer, the sharp, small Keith Sabado, working his way into the piano waltzes [mostly by Carl Czerny] with a wave of the arm and a nod of the head, much as one might improvise when hearing the music for the first time. From this, however, comes a blur of bodily motion bounding across in skips, jumps and falls.

The piece is filled with fun: a jumping-jack duet, a tipsily balanced solo, a gloriously tumbling finale, and a delicious trio consisting of a series of lifts performed by the stolid Donald Mouton with the lighter-than-air elves of Penny Hutchinson and Teri Weksler.

It's a work of joy.