

DANCE REVIEW

An adventurous Mark Morris Group

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP. Post-modern dance choreographed by Mark Morris. Lighting design by Phil Sandstrom. Friday night's program, "Marble Halls and Other Works," will be presented Dec. 12, 14, 15, 18, 20 and 22. The Morris troupe is at Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie Schoenberg Theater Thursdays through Sundays through Dec. 22.

By Janice Berman

Mark Morris, whose choreography and performance created an enormous stir last year at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, is in the midst of his first Manhattan season. What attracted last season continues to attract; namely, that Morris is at once serious and witty, that he is a powerful performer and a keen observer, that he is innovative, that his company — now numbering 13 others — is filled with excellent dancers.

More evident at the Bessie Schoenberg theater than at BAM, though, is the breadth of his experimentation and exploration.

Morris, who hails from Seattle, has taught ballet (and has been commissioned to make dances for the Boston and Joffrey ballet companies) and has danced with troupes like Lar Lubovitch's, Laura Dean's and Eliot Feld's. But he's also performed with a Balkan folk-dance group. Choreographically, Morris is going off in many different directions at once.

"Handel Choruses" is an example. It consists of four solos; each red-clad dancer has a turn, set to a different



Beatriz Schiller

The Mark Morris Dance Group 'off in many directions at once'

chorus, while the others lie at rest about the floor. Keith Sabado goes first, in "All We Like Sheep," and he looks exactly like a sheep. He holds his hands up to make the distinctive black eye masks; he crosses his feet at the knees to look like he's wobbling in a field; he looks distinctly sheepish, as if he has indeed gone astray, and arranges his fingers to look like cloven hooves. He also whips off some flickering, beautiful turns around the pe-

riphery of where everyone is crouched, and he is a gorgeous dancer. So he is at once beautiful to look at and very funny.

Morris has the second solo, which is equally brilliant. In "Jealousy," from "Hercules," he displays a characteristic mixture of force, languor and audacity. He freezes his body into a twisted, one-legged pose that is filled with energy; he undulates his hands like an Indian dancer.

The third soloist, Penny Hutchinson, has a balletic quietude about her as she dances to an excerpt from "Israel in Egypt," "He Sent Thick Darkness." She shields her eyes from the light; then her hands seem to gently massage and shape the space around her, and she casts a spell.

Such magic as all this inventiveness has stirred is totally wiped out by the rth solo, danced by Susan Hadley. Another excerpt from "Hercules," "Crown with Festal Pomp the Day," looks more like festal stomp. Hadley is big and the steps are enormous, noisy and declarative in the manner of folkdance steps. "Handel Choruses" displays a tremendously diverse range of movement, but the diversity ultimately destroys its impact.

This is not the case in some of Morris's shorter works, particularly the lovely solo for Guillermo Resto, "I Love You Dearly," which is filled with folk-based steps, yet also balletic.

"Marble Halls," set to Bach, seems to stay pretty strictly within the conventional ballet-modern, high-speed, big finale limits. It contains impulses that range from baroque to boogie, much in the manner of Paul Taylor's work. But Morris is not derivative; he embodies surprises of his own, like that distinctive torsion of the body, the unexpected sidewise kicks. The running, jumping and hopping could use a much larger stage, and doubtless that will be coming to Morris in short order. He remains one of the most promising choreographers working. /■