

Old and New Visions

Mark Morris A Chorus Line

By HILARY OSTLERE

Mark Morris is one of the brightest, wittiest, most ribald talents to come along in some time. He and his company, a rather androgynous-looking group of some 12 dancers, hit various dance festivals last summer. Now, his impact is beginning to resound, if not in the dance hall of fame, at least around the places where new trends matter.

Seattle-based Morris is not just a brilliant performer and inventive choreographer, he is also an iconoclast, knowing exactly how to tweak noses without actually mocking his peers. In an ensemble piece, *Marble Halls*, there is more than a touch of Paul

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Taylor's choreographic mannerisms. The lightening entrances and exits, the running jumps and the leaps with the legs pulled up and bent under, the outspread arms—even the preference for baroque music (Morris uses Bach's *Concerto for Two Harpsichord in C Minor* for *Marble Halls*) is another hat tip to Taylor. Yet, Morris's work never looks derivative or unoriginal.

In *Love, You Have Won*, to a Vivaldi cantata sung by a high-flying soprano, Morris and one of his company members perform a duet of sorts, dressed in 18th Century be-ruffled shirts, black tights that give the effect of knickers—and bare feet. Morris has gone back to one of the world's greatest dancers of another era, Vestris, the 18th Century star, for his source. Though using the semblance of ballet steps, Morris and partner cavort about in virtuoso Vestris style, jetes bounding back and forth, wrist flourishes, a *batterie* of what might be termed off-beats, dippy hip flips and sloppy

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Mark Morris: he tips his hat to tradition yet remains an iconoclast in the world of dance.

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stissones—all the conceits of the era including elaborate bows. But everything is slightly skewed.

Morris is an experimentalist in today's styles too. He is at his most stridently original in *Lovey*, where lingerie-clad dancers, each with a naked plastic doll, dance to the raw and explicit music of *The Violent Femmes*. The pounding score starts with *I Hear the Rain* and continues into *Blister in the Sun* and *Kiss Off*.

The dancers shake, kick, twitch, implore and implode, sometimes hurling the dolls about, occasionally cradling them in intimate embraces. Morris has caught the frantic, hopeless despair and sheer animalism of frustrated youth, casting an unblinking eye at its sexual fantasies. *Lovey* may not be the most elegant example of the art of dance seen on a stage recently, but he certainly knows how to shake up an audience.

Appearing at the Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie Schonberg Theatre, W. 19th Street, through December 22, there's still time to catch the spectacular Morris and his

troupe. They're fast selling out so call for seat availability.

Speaking of flashy dancing, Jeffrey Hornaday, who choreographed the movie *Flashdance* and the newly opened *A Chorus Line*, has ushered in the new era of video/dance, movie style—a technique that might trouble some of the film purists who believe the art is in the dancer and not the camera.

The clever techniques that allow a dancer to turn 20 turns, when they only actually did 10, are becoming more and more apparent in the jagged, aggressive film-dance style that Hornaday and others have perfected.

We know that skillful editing can make or break a film and Astaire and Gene Kelly enhanced their films with knowledgeable editing, an essential part of film making. They took the best of the takes and went on from there. But today's movie choreographers create their dance out of the raw material provided by the dancers—not the perfected product of 20 takes. And it shows. When even the backline gypsies are dancing like Baryshnikov on a good day, it's a little hard to suspend disbelief. Make no mistake, *A Chorus Line* has some terrific dancing. But don't believe all you see is actually being performed.