

Morris is naughty with a loving touch

CONCERT DANCE COMPANY OF BOSTON - At the Boston Shakespeare Theater, last night. Performance repeats tonight.

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

What can you do in 3/4 time? Well, you can swirl and swoon, as in, say, Balanchine's "Vienna

DANCE REVIEW

Waltzes." Or you can go splat, as in Mark Morris's wonderful 1982 "Canonic 3/4 Studies," given its local premiere by Concert Dance Company of Boston last night. Morris sets his studies to the kind of plodding ballet class music that accompanies yet another round of 64 "tendus" by students whose eyes glaze over as soon as their hands touch the barre.

"Canonic 3/4 Studies" is about dancers in class, dancers fantasizing, dancers as blindly obedient creatures. Most of all, it is about the addictive effect of a particular pulse. Morris, that most impish of choreographers, has the seven CDC dancers tippy-toe across the stage or lie down and twitch their hips with the determination of overweight ladies in an exercise class. Borne aloft by the lift of the music, they suddenly thud to the floor as if they have been shot. They may be tackling ballet's most grandiose steps, but their faces wear the absent-minded look of shoppers wheeling supermarket carts.

A listless, innocent bystander type must partner two women who leap wanly in front of him: The trio seem in need of iron pills. Morris is naughty about the numbing effects of even ballet's most invigorating steps when they are repeated for the zillionth time. But he does not spare modern dance, either. As the dancers sag and thump along you can almost hear an instructor commanding them to "Feel your weight!"

"Canonic 3/4 Studies" is funny but not slapstick, and it doesn't clobber the audience with literal puns as some ballet take-offs do. Yes, Morris pokes fun at various aspects of dance, but he does so with a loving touch and an absence of sarcasm.

The major premiere on this program - which also included Murray Louis' "Porcelain Dialogues" and CDC artistic director Deborah Wolf's clever duet

"Straight Up" - was "Light, Part 22," by the Japanese-American choreographer Kei Takei.

Since 1969, Takei has been creating loosely related, numbered works, all called "Light." Part 22 has a haunting score by two fine Boston musicians, Barbara Dacey and Stan Strickland, and decor by Japanese artist Tetsuhiko Maeda. It also has a narrative thread, beginning with a repeated, spell-casting phrase that looks as though the dancers are sowing seeds. Throughout much of the work, the seven dancers' eyes are downcast and their backs bent, as if under the weight of a burden. They seem connected to the earth, and their rhythmic movement springs from the patterns of their audible breathing. It takes an outside interruption to freeze this movement and make them suddenly cast suspicious, attentive glances up or into the wings.

Several times, Maeda's tree-like ropes fall from the rafters, ultimately creating a forest which divides and isolates the dancers.

Bravo to CDC for commissioning it, and bravo to the company's gifted dancers - Wolf, Renee Caso, Dan Joyce, Leslie Shafer Koval, David Peck, Joel Shweky, and Andrea Taylor - who performed "Light" and everything else on this program with beautiful intensity.



MARK MORRIS