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## The Oh So Bad Boys of Dance

By PATRICK PACHÉCO

**S**TANDING AT THE BACK OF THE orchestra of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's stately opera house, the young choreographer looked like a desperado who had just ridden into town. Beer cans, the color of silver bullets, rode in the hip pockets of his baggy jeans, and he slugged backed another while watching his company of dancers perform before a packed opening-night audience. Two alarmed ushers had threatened to eject the young man until a nervous academy executive pulled them aside and informed them that this curly-haired renegade was indeed "the" Mark Morris, the new darling of the dance world for whom the rules of ordinary mortals did not apply.

The Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, continuing through Dec. 30, has become something of a home for the "bad boys" of dance. Last month, Britain's 24-year-old Michael Clark and his company had tongues wagging and the critics scolding for an outrageous camp punkiness entitled "No Fire Escape in Hell." Tonight, David Gordon and his Pick-Up Company open in the Opera House, and next week Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane and their company move in for the world premiere of "The Animal Trilogy," part one of which is entitled "How to Walk an Elephant."

While these shaggy iconoclasts are radically different in their approach to dance, frequently fusing modern dance with classical ballet movements, what they all have in common is an insouciant determination to be unpredictable—a goal which is invariably subverted as they move from the low-pressure, small dance spaces to the opera stage and to a media that has begun to shine on choreographers a spotlight usually reserved for rock stars.

Clark was quickly dubbed a "whacked-out Ni-

jinsky" and the mainstream press flocked to hail Mark Morris as someone "who could yet be the Isadora Duncan of his era." With some perversity, these glowing pronouncements are more often than not followed up with critical drubbings that ask, "What's all the fuss about?"

In "Trying Times," David Gordon sent up these attitudes by playing a defendant accused of many sins including confounding expectations of what a post-modern choreographer does or does not do. And Clark, in a show in London, had a female groupie dash on stage in mid-performance and shout, "Michael, when are you going to cut out the gimmicks and just dance?"

"If you're going to be scared," says David Gordon of the need to come up with the unexpected, "you might as well scare yourself to death. Hold your breath and jump off the cliff. If you're not willing to do that, you're in the wrong business."

Although those risks proportionately increase with the widening audience, particularly in a dance age when the company director must be a savvy businessman as well as creative genius, most dancers welcome the attention and the opportunity to create more accessible work.

"It's not easy to set yourself on fire each night," says Bill T. Jones. Adds his partner Arnie Zane, "I see nothing wrong with being accessible. The media love the new, but that doesn't mean your company is going to be there tomorrow. We're on a slippery ledge with a crack in it. We have a vision and an artistic agenda that we must generate income to support."

Sexual frankness and ambiguity is still the prevailing shock quotient in the tradition of Nijinsky, the original "bad boy." But whereas the immortal dancer's madness led him to the asylum, these choreographers express their lunacy onstage with dollops of humor that transform mod-



**LAR LUBOVITCH:** A former bad boy

ern dance as an expression of angst. Morris and Gordon, for example, are as quick to acknowledge their debt to old movies as to their revered predecessors.

Humor alone, however, may not be able to entirely allay the pressures of fame and big money building around these *enfants terribles* of dance. Mark Morris, for one, has chosen, at the peak of his fame, to move back to his hometown of Seattle to get away from the glare. In dealing with his meteoric rise, he might well take his cue from Lar Lubovitch in whose company he once danced and who opened yesterday at City Center for a week's engagement.

After nearly two decades, Lubovitch, once the "bad boy" of the Harkness Ballet, is hitting his stride, earning critical praise and enthusiastic audiences for his demanding and exciting work. Asked to look back at his career, he observes: "Perhaps the most important thing I learned is that in order to be truly creative, you must be able to totally override the judgments of others, and, above all, the learned judgments of yourself that you've picked up during your life. We are here, simply, to create beautiful, meaningful dance."

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