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DANCE

By OTIS STUART

Mark Morris's Dance Theater Workshop Season Reveals Growing Fulfillment Of His Choreographic Promise

Dancer and choreographer Mark Morris brought his Seattle-based modern dance company back to New York City recently in an ambitious two-program, three-week season at Dance Theater Workshop. The Morris dancers had a tough act to follow—their own hugely successful program at the Brooklyn Academy of Music last year. In the final analysis, however, Morris's extraordinary DTW programs did not as much compete with the memory of their successful predecessor as lend it a richer perspective, of promise burgeoning into reality.

Mark Morris is indisputably the company's stellar attraction. In his rapid-fire rise to prominence, Morris has established himself as the most genuinely *avant* of the *garde* currently spearheading American contemporary choreography. His own apprenticeship through a sweep of modern companies (including those run by Laura Dean, Eliot Feld, Hannah Kahn and Twyla Tharp) culminated in Morris's return to his native Seattle to found a troupe as a showcase for his own choreography. The results, reconfirmed by the DTW programs, lend credence to the concept of voluntary exile.

The alternating DTW programs were loosely categorized as one evening of solo and chamber-scale works and one evening of more overtly ensemble works and *pas de deux*. Morris's musical choices were typically extravagant. The first program opened with traditional Roumanian music and closed with Bach. The second opened with relatively anonymous music best described as sounding like its composer's name (Luigi Boccherini) and closed with a group stomp to Shostakovich. The look of the work throughout was culture specific—aggressive haircuts, unilateral androgyny, ubiquitous sarcasm and tons of technique.

But Morris's real distinction is



The Mark Morris Dance Group presents Morris's "Championship Wrestling After Roland Barthes."

that, as Edwin Denby wrote about Paul Taylor, he is a contemporary choreographer who has taken the trouble to teach himself the principles of a well-made ballet. The choreography has a structural security that makes his improbably eclectic movement idiom look coherent; it looks unlikely, but it all makes sense. Morris's affinity for his immediate social and cultural environment can occasionally become intrusive. Because his stronger motivation is toward the pulse and the drive in his music, though, balance is inevitably restored through the sheer, sculptured power of the whole.

The dancers, including Morris himself, were uniformly excellent, with Teri Weksler and Robert Besserer as

particular stand-outs. Weksler's limber, wiry dimensions express the best in Morris's lucid, uncluttered choreography for women. Because Morris has no axes to grind at either polarity, gender, in whatever form, becomes a form of assertion. Those assertions are made without indulgence, patronization or pleabargaining on behalf of men or women, or those in between. Androgynous clarity is a Morris trademark. The tall, blond, distant Besserer—like Morris, a veteran of a slew of modern companies—provides the requisite classical reference, both in his Apollonian presence and in his purity of expression, that represents another Morris hallmark. Morris's company cannot return to New York soon enough. ■