

ARTS & FILMS

Silly and somber beautifully united in dance

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP — At the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Tuesday. The company performs at the Pillow through Saturday.

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

A tiny remote control truck plays a substantial solo role in "Deck of Cards," one of the Mark

Dance review

Morris dances on this program of campy, provocative and even profound works at Jacob's

Pillow this week. Another work, the 1987 "Strict Songs," is dedicated to the memory of Liberace and concludes with a particularly magical image. The dancers "fly" like children pretending to be angels: Half of them lie on their backs, extending their legs straight up; their flexed feet become platforms on which the other dancers balance, seeming about to soar upward. A third dance, the 1985 "Jealousy," features Morris himself in an extravagant emotional display set to a chorus from Handel's "Hercules." As usual in a Mark Morris program, the silly bumps up against the somber in the most unpredictable ways. The choreography gushes out in torrents, with nary a nameable dance step.

Morris is dressed in scarlet for "Jealousy." Tearing at his clothes and tossing his Bette Davis mane, he is the picture of writhing agony. His movement is grounded by its sheer heaviness: He could almost be dragging an invisible ball and chain. He embroiders movements that are essentially smooth and weighty with twitches of the hips, frothy twirls of the wrists, and the backward swooning gestures of a fainting goddess in a baroque painting. He finishes the dance curled on the stage, his but-



Lois Greenfield photo

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tocks pointing upward into a spotlight, a pose that would be ludicrous in another context but here comes off as poignant instead.

Morris is the most sought-after choreographer on the internation-

al dance scene just now. He's 30, but his public image is still that of petulant, willful *enfant terrible*. All but one of the dancers in his company are in their 30's; they're veterans in the youth-oriented world of dance. They perform like grown-ups — tough, muscular, no-nonsense. In "My Party," though, Morris turns them into adults playing at being kids playing at a party. There's a cheerfully chaotic line dance and an arm-swinging

square dance and a stiff-legged doll bit. The dancers dive at each other enthusiastically, looking right into each other's eyes except in a circle dance that is oddly sad and isolated: Here they hold hands, but they look only at the ceiling and the floor. "My Party" is the first work on the program; it bonds dancers and audience right off and, because Morris doesn't perform in it, reminds us that there is more to his company than the choreographer himself.

The truck's solo, cruising around the stage, its headlights puny beacons in the darkness, opens "Deck of Cards." Then Morris comes on in a blowy orange dress, spewing cigarette smoke, strutting and quivering restlessly. Best of all is the last part, a solo for Donald Mouton, who wears a snappy army uniform, minus the pants, and mimes the words to T. Texas Tyler's song about the relationship of a deck of cards to the Bible. The 10 card reminds him of the Ten Commandments, and so on. Mouton gets through the whole routine with a straight face and a soldier's crisp gestures. Morris and the truck join him at the end in an apotheosis of excess.

There's a heavy perfume about the final work, Morris's 1982 group piece named for its Brahms' music, "New Love Song Waltzes." The scent is part athletic sweat, part the fragrance of an overblown rose on a hot summer's night. The swirling couples come in male/female, male/male, and female/female varieties; choreography is irrespective of gender. One haunting image, faintly ridiculous, features dancers flying like languid, 20th century sylphs, propelled by partners who lift them under the armpits. Weight and lack of it are important: A dancer being dragged along the stage is so leaden that his heels squeak against the floor. In the momentous conclusion, dancers ripple to the floor like dominoes in yet another of Morris's breathtaking and seemingly effortless effects.