

DANCE PREVIEW

Mark Morris Dance Group, tonight and tomorrow night at 8 at Bagley Wright Theater: an all-Morris program — "40 Arms, 20 Necks, One Wreathing," "Handel Choruses," "The Shepherd on the Rock" and "Gloria." For tickets, call 628-0888.

This weekend's appearance of Morris and his company was originally scheduled for Meany Theater. But the filming of Pacific Northwest Ballet's "The Nutcracker" at Meany is not finished, and the dance company agreed to move to the Bagley Wright Theater. It will be the first professional dance company to dance there.

Four dances are on the program. "40 Arms, 20 Necks, One Wreathing," which premiered at the American Dance Festival two years ago, incorporates members of the Mark Morris Dance Group as well as members of Morris' UW workshop. "Handel Choruses," from last year, sets four solos, one of which Morris will dance opening night, to choruses from three Handel oratorios ("Messiah," "Hercules," "Israel in Egypt"). "Gloria," for 10 dancers, is set to Vivaldi's Gloria. "The Shepherd on the Rock," set to Schubert's music of the same name, is a world premiere.

Morris has amazingly eclectic tastes in music — from Yoko Ono and the Louvin Brothers, Handel, Purcell and Bach, to Famil love songs. But until now he has skipped most music of the 19th century and the Romantic period.

"The Schubert is the first real Romantic piece I've done," Morris said. "There is real partnering, not many motifs. It runs around being Romantic."

Regardless of the type of music Morris uses, the music is central to his choreographic process. "I always begin with music. I study the score if there is one. Then I work out the place, the action. The last thing I do is the steps."

"I make a lot of rules and then change them. I don't like a lot of working time. The piece comes more easily if I have a deadline."

Morris doesn't do a lot of revising, although "Gloria" is a 1984 revision of a 1981 work. "After a while you have to leave things alone."

A year ago Morris announced he was returning to his native city — Seattle. The New York press was fascinated with the decision. So was Seattle. However, since then Morris has not been here often. He travels too much to be anywhere for long.

"When I came back here, I thought I would be a pillar of the community," said Morris, laughing. "It didn't work out that way, and it's better. I divide my time between the two coasts. That way I like New York and Seattle better."

After the fall season Morris returns to Seattle to teach at the UW again. Lucky UW dance department. He will also do a piece, set to the music of Kurt Weill and Lou Harrison, for the Seattle Men's Chorus next spring.

Morris has not applied for any grant money from local private or public funding sources, although he could rightly walk away with a nice bundle of cash. "It's easier this way," he said. "I don't have to be responsible to anyone."

When asked what he thought of his hometown, Morris considered the question for a moment. "Seattle is not big on irony. Everything has to appear to be all right. Everything has to be nice."

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Choreographer bemused by his newfound fame

By R.M. Campbell

P-I Dance Critic

It has not been so many years that Mark Morris has been famous.

But famous he is.

"Yes, it is true," the choreographer agreed earlier this week over a double iced latte and a fruit cup. Morris, who performs with his Mark Morris Dance Group tonight and tomorrow night at Bagley Wright Theater, was between teaching a two-week workshop at the University of Washington's Meany Theater and conducting a rehearsal of his dance "Gloria."

He made a Morris smile, the very picture of self-amusement and irony, at the prospect of his fame.

Curious things happen in such a state, he said, like reading a story in the Sunday New York Times about the Paris Opera Ballet's first New York appearance in nearly 40 years and learning that the company, headed by Rudolf Nureyev, plans to do a new Morris piece. The choreographer didn't know anything about it.

Or, hearing that Pacific Northwest Ballet's contribution to Performa 87, the King County Arts Commission's new-works festival yet to be born, was a commissioned Morris piece. He didn't know anything about that, either.

There are also some nice things happening to Morris.

He won a Guggenheim fellowship in April, one-half of which is going to the company to keep it together. An hour-long "Dance in America" segment devoted to Morris and his company, shot in Seattle and Copenhagen earlier this year, is tentatively scheduled for national telecast Oct. 17. Later this summer Morris goes to New York to work on a ballet commissioned by the Joffrey Ballet for its 30th season; the working title is "I Was Big Foot's Love Slave." The Brooklyn Academy of Music has invited Morris and his company back in the fall for this year's version of its prestigious and well-publicized Next Wave Festival. And Morris is talking to opera companies on both coasts about staging operas, something he has never done before.

Among the amazing facts about Morris is that he only began making dances six years ago and became a dance celebrity less than two years ago. Since then, his fame has spread from dance columns to Time, People, Us and Newsweek.

But the crucial thing about Morris is not his fame, but his work, to which he is devoted.

To be an important artist, he said, takes talent and conviction. "It is hard to find greatness."

Choreographers Morris respects are George Balanchine, Paul Taylor, Merce Cunningham ("Where would any of us be without him?"), Martha Graham and Lucinda Childs ("I like her purity and clarity").

Morris likes choreographers who have a good spirit. He does not like choreographers he describes as "vengeful" — choreographers like Twyla Tharp and Senta Driver whose work says "So there," "Take that."

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