

# ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT SPOTLIGHT

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E1 / PRESS-TELEGRAM

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## The outrageous Master Morris

By Salli Stevenson

**H**is work has been called "lush," "outrageously foxy," "detached," "riveting" and "unpredictable."

He is acclaimed by the

New York press as the "next of the major moderns."

The praise is enough to make a gourmand of any young talent.

But not Mark Morris. The 29-year-old "golden boy" of the dance world

chooses to focus on his work rather than on head-turning accolades.

While flattered that "people love my work and take it seriously enough to analyze it, the review is third or fourth generation by the time it gets to the reader. It's not the same thing as watching it being danced," said Morris whose 13-member company, the Mark Morris Dance Group, will make its Los Angeles area debut at the University Theater at California State University, Saturday at 8 p.m.

Morris' modesty may come from the fact that he has been making up dances since he was a child.

"I have never lived without dancing and choreography. I just didn't know what to call it then," he said during a break from a hectic rehearsal schedule at his home base in Seattle, Wash. "It was a natural transition into making that my life."

An appearance by Jose Greco prompted the then 9-year-old Morris to take formal training in ethnic dance and ballet with Verla Fowers. At 14, Morris joined Kole-da, a semi-professional Balkan dance group. After a sojourn in Madrid where he studied flamenco, the Seattle native returned to his home town to complete his ballet training under Perry Brunson.

At 19, Morris headed to New York.

"New York was fuel for my choreography," Morris said. While there he danced with and assimilated the varying choreographic styles of the Feld Ballet, Kathryn Posin, Twyla Tharp, Lar Lubovitch, Laura Dean and Hannah Kahn.

Further inspiration for his choreogra-

phy came from watching the New York City Ballet, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor and Lucinda Childs.

In 1980 Morris formed his own company. He garnered raves for his work in New York and won a New York Dance and Performance Award (a Bessie) for choreographic achievement in 1984.

Morris has since returned to Seattle, becoming a bi-coastal artist. "Though new York serves a very important function for me inspirationally, I just don't like living there. It's more beautiful, it's cleaner and it's easier to live in Seattle." Morris' company visits Seattle twice a year to learn new pieces, rehearse and tour the West.

As a child Morris studied music with his father, and he approaches dance from a strictly musical point of view.

"I listen to the music, and I almost always rehearse with the score. I find rhythmic and melodic lines that make me like a particular piece of music. Those (lines) are the first to be translated into action," he said.

Some music translates into leaps or rolls on the ground. Other notes sound "like a fall. I don't know what fall it is until I've worked with the dancers," Morris explained.

Noted for his earthy, ground oriented work, Morris sculpts his pieces onto his dancers rather than spending hours in the studio alone developing material.

"I'm not going to perform it — they are — and I change my mind about the movement as I watch them read back what I've given them."

Morris describes his evolving strategy: "I don't just do what feels good. I used to. Now I'm more strict in composing the structure of a piece. I work in units of action, like modules. I really limit the dance vocabulary severely. My problem is how to make a dance out of a small palette of movements and arrange it in a way that is interesting."

Saturday's program will showcase a potpourri of older works including "Dogtown" to the music of Yoko Ono; "Gloria," an earthy romp to music by Vivaldi, and

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## The outrageous Master Morris

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"One Charming Night," a duet featuring Morris and Teri Weksler.

Two new pieces will complete the Long Beach bill.

"Ballabili" was created for a gala benefit for the Seattle Opera. "It's danced to the triumphal music, Act, 2, Scene 2 in Verdi's 'Aida,' and it's very post card Egyptian. Not the temple walls, but the velvet paintings of temple walls," Morris explained.

The second new work is Franz Schubert's "Shepherd on a Rock." Morris has loved the piece for years. "I started to

**WHAT:** Mark Morris Dance Group.

**WHEN, WHERE:** 8 p.m. Saturday at University Theater of California State University/Long Beach.

**TICKETS:** \$15 general admission, \$12 students and seniors, available through box office, 498-5526, open weekdays 11 a.m.-5 p.m.

choreograph it two or three times, then stopped. I just wasn't ready. It's the first

piece of heavy duty, romantic music that I've done. It's a swirling dance for three couples.

"I've just finished a major chunk of it today," Morris said cheerfully.

Only a few structural modules of movement were needed to complete "Shepherd," and Morris admitted to being a little "insane while working on a new piece but this (work) is basically the most fulfilling and nourishing thing that happens to me."

So saying, the newest jewel in modern dance went back to his palette.



At 29, choreographer Mark Morris' eclectic, energetic works have placed him among the elite of the dance world.