

# Morris creates dances for the times at Pillow

By H.B. KRONEN

Mark Morris makes dances for his times. Suffused with a comic book sensibility, the dances which make up this fifth program at Jacob's Pillow, are yet seriously crafted, skilled works. All are choreographed to songs, and all share a spirited



point of view, faintly distanced from the given situation. It is this distancing, only slightly ironic in its self-awareness, yet without even a hint of disdain, which makes Morris' work so immediate. It is an attitude of the '80's.

Morris acknowledges myriad sources in the field. He has studied Flamenco, danced with a Balkan folk ensemble, worked with Eliot Feld, Twyla Tharp, Laura Dean and Hannah Kahn before moving back to his home base in Seattle, Wash. There is more than a passing resemblance to Paul Taylor, though Morris' work is faster, more hip. And it is evident that real life informs his dances.

Yet it is a comic-book comprehension — classic comics, super heroes, punk comic commentary — which gives shape to his style. It can be scary even when it's funny.

□ □ □

The twelve dancers who form the company look up-to-the-minute, off-the-street. Of disparate body types and training, they defy stereotypes, as they are no doubt meant to do. Many look as if they owe their muscular development to lifting weights rather than plies. Gender is the least

## Bits & Pieces

### Review

guide to part or partnering. Morris once said of his dancers, "They've had lives, they've read books, they've been in love, so they can dance."

He has an easy musicality which ranges from Henry Purcell to Yoko Ono. "I don't make people dance the same way, but they have to be hearing the music the same way," he has said. "It's like jumping double Dutch. Once you miss your cross, you're gone. The dance is no good. I definitely do get things down to the hemidemisemiquaver."

□ □ □

"The Shepherd on the Rock" is set to lieder by Schubert. It is as if Dresden figures, slightly shabby and ever so slightly purient in their pleasures and pairings, were brought to lustful, lyric life. The music has a running quality which Morris uses for momentum, but the dancers in this first piece on Tuesday night, were a bit awkward, as if not quite able to get all the movements into a measure, all the patterns onto the Pillow stage.

"Dogtown," one of two major presentations on the program, is set to five hard-driving songs by Yoko Ono. This is an unrelenting, riveting work of hard-edged sex and user-abuser relationships. The dancers wear bright colors, tights cut off at the knees, a bikini-like triangle outlining the pelvis, front and back. The women wear bras, all wear gloves, some wear kneepads — useful because much of the dance is performed on their knees. These are "krazy kat nazis," stepping on one another, forcing each others' actions. Their intent is clearest when they are lined up, a compositional device Morris uses often in several dances.

"Ballabili" is Morris' classic comic book condensation of "Aida" to sections of Verdi's score. The dancers, costumed in fatuous versions of ancient Egyptian dress, perform acrobatics in characteristic profile, taut lifts with flexed hands and feet, geometric port de bras. It is a wildly funny piece.

□ □ □

"One Charming Night" to songs by Henry Purcell is a duet of 19th century courtship given a very contemporary edge, both humorous and terrifying. With an exuberant sleaziness, Teri Weksler and Mark Morris dance through desire, pursuit, seduction, hesitation and abusive passion with a sadomasochistic undercurrent.

"Gloria" is Morris' brave new world vision juxtaposed to Vivaldi's "Gloria in D Major." He has a strong grasp of music and the choreogra-

phy, despite a limited vocabulary, is dense. As in "Dogtown," the dancers spend an inordinate amount of time on the floor, belly and chin pressed into the floor as if they are being forced down into the ground even as they strive to move across the surface. Clearly this is meant as metaphor; the piece ends with the company flattened. Yet there is an overriding lyricism anyway, in spite of an odd jitter or carefully placed spasm, in spite of bodies bent over or dragged, gestures grasped and bound. The choreography is unbridled and the dancing irrepressible.

The Mark Morris Dance Group will be performing at Jacob's Pillow tonight at 8 p.m., Friday at 8:30 p.m. and Saturday at 2 and 8:30 p.m. Prior to the evening performances, Liz Lerman will be performing in the Inside/Out series.