

# US master of movement

The best new ballets I have seen in the last two or three years have been the work of choreographers not from the ranks of the ballet companies themselves but from the field of contemporary or "post-modern" dance.

Among these I would name Merce Cunningham's *Un Jour ou deux* for the Paris Opéra and *Arcade* for the Pennsylvania Ballet; Twyla Tharp's *Bach Partita* for American Ballet Theatre and *Brahms/Handel*, her collaboration with Jerome Robbins for New York City Ballet; David Gordon's *Field, Chair and Mountain*, also for ABT; and Richard Alston's *Midsummer* for the Royal Ballet. All these ballets explore and extend the classic vocabulary—they do not propose a hybrid of ballet and modern-dance idioms.

To this short list I would now add *Mort subite*, a ballet by Mark Morris to the Poulenc organ concerto, presented by the Boston Ballet in February and shown recently at the enterprising Pepsico Summerfare festival at the State University of New York's suburban campus at Purchase, New York.

Morris's situation in the American dance scene is roughly similar to that of Michael Clark in the British—he is a young dancer of prodigious gifts and a decidedly contemporary persona, who has recently shown an equal talent for choreography. Superficially, his subject-matter sometimes seems designed to shock, but underneath this the work shows the serious concern for dance



Lois Greenfield

Mark Morris

structure of a real choreographer.

As the title suggests, *Mort subite* deals with a very large subject, though in abstract terms. The piece is for 16 dancers, with a core group of (at first) four men, each of whom is replaced, one by one, by a woman; at the end one of the women is in turn replaced by a man.

This scheme, with its constantly changing series of relationships (from four men to three men and one woman, to two couples, and so on), may be seen as a metaphor for the life-cycle itself. In some of his earlier work, Morris has not gone much beyond literal music visualisation, but in *Mort subite* he has built a structure of his own on the foundation of Poulenc's concerto.

Not only is Morris a thorough formalist; movement is his natural, instinctive form of expression. He is full of ideas, and he makes dances all the time. Last winter the Mark Morris Dance Group performed for three weeks at Dance Theatre Workshop in New York, giving two different programmes, 13 works in all, ranging from the pure and rigorous geometry of *Frisson* (to Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*) to the savage examination of human

relationships of *Lovey* (to songs by the Violent Femmes), and the macabre duet *One Charming Night*, danced by Morris himself as a vampire and Teri Weksler as his willing victim (to music of Purcell, no less).

A few weeks later the group appeared in Boston, dancing an evening-length triptych entitled *Mythologies*, inspired by the essays of Roland Barthes and commissioned by the (Boston) Dance Umbrella. A couple of weeks ago they were at another summer festival, that originated by Ted Shawn at Jacob's Pillow in Massachusetts. There the programme included new works to Schubert's *The Shepherd on the Rock* (his choreography for this sublime piece did not convince me that it needs the addition of dancing) and to the ballet music from *Aida*, a hilarious spoof that gave the music exactly what it deserves.

As will be seen, Morris's choice of music is nothing if not electric—other works in this concert were danced to the *Gloria* of Vivaldi and to songs by Yoko Ono. All of them have in common an impressive grasp of musical structure, and a seemingly inexhaustible invention of movement.

Not surprisingly, Morris is in demand. Next season he will choreograph a work for the Joffrey Ballet, to a C. P. E. Bach cello concerto, and another for his own group to the Pergolesi *Stabat Mater*, to be seen at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's *Next Wave* Festival. The Paris Opéra Ballet has also announced a *création* by Morris, without apparently informing him of the commission.

The pressure to succeed at this stage of his career could be damaging, and Morris has shown enough confidence in himself to move away from New York, back to his home town of Seattle, where the lively arts flourish but in a more relaxed atmosphere. There he teaches and makes work between concerts and commissions in other cities. At a time when choreographic talent is in short supply, Morris's emergence, and increasing mastery, are heartening indeed.

**David Vaughan**

with Rudolf Firkusny piano. All-Mendelssohn programme (Mon); Festival Orchestra. Gerard Schwarz conducting, Eugene Istomin piano, Arleen Auger soprano. Schubert, Mozart (Tue, Wed); Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio with Michael Tree viola, Caroline Levine viola and Julius Levine doublebass. Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schubert (Thur). Lincoln Center (874 2424).

## WASHINGTON

**Summer Festival** (Concert Hall): Highlighted by a visit from the Newport Folk Festival in August, this summer-long string of popular singers and musicians includes recital performances by Neil Sedaka, Shirley Bassey, Dionne Warwick and Petula Clark. Kennedy Center. Ends Aug 27.

Henlen Dannenberg from San Francisco in Solo with Figures (and other works). (Thur). 19th St. W. of 7th Av. (924 0077).

**Summer Stage** (Central Park): Free new dance series. Kathy Duncan, Donald Byrd/The Group (Wed); Urban Bush Woman, Frey Faust with music by Pat Cahill (Thur). Bandshell at 72nd St. 6 pm. (397 3156).

## CHICAGO

**avinia Festival of American Dance.** A fortnight dance festival features the San Francisco Ballet with a mixed programme including a William Forsythe premiere, and the Twyla Tharp Company in a mixed programme including a work choreographed to a Philip Glass score. Ends Au 31. Highland Park. (728 4642).

## TOKYO

**Il T. Jones and Arnie Agne and Company** (avant-garde): Pooh Kaye and Eccentric Motions. Part of the Tokyo 2nd American Dance Festival. Theatre Apple, Shinjuku (207 5588).

## Robert Lloyd out of Glyndebourne Prom

Robert Lloyd has had to withdraw from Glyndebourne Festival Opera's Prom performance of Simon Boccanegra at the Albert Hall on Sunday, August 17. Geoffrey Moses will now sing the role of Fiesco, with Alastair Miles taking the part of Pietro in place of Geoffrey Moses.

## Hungary exhibition

The venue of the Hungarian turn of the century exhibition reviewed on this page yesterday is the National Gallery, Budapest. The exhibition runs until September 1.