

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL. Becket, Massachusetts. Mark Morris Dance Group, Jim Self, Liz Lerman, Mandala Folk Dance Ensemble.

SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY. At the Mount, Lenox, Massachusetts.

One of the attractive things about Mark Morris's work is its capacity for surprising you. Morris hasn't set out to define a style: blessed with a wide-ranging musical taste, an eclectic background as a dancer, and enormous facility with movement and structure, he often tackles familiar genres and filters them through an uncommon sensibility.

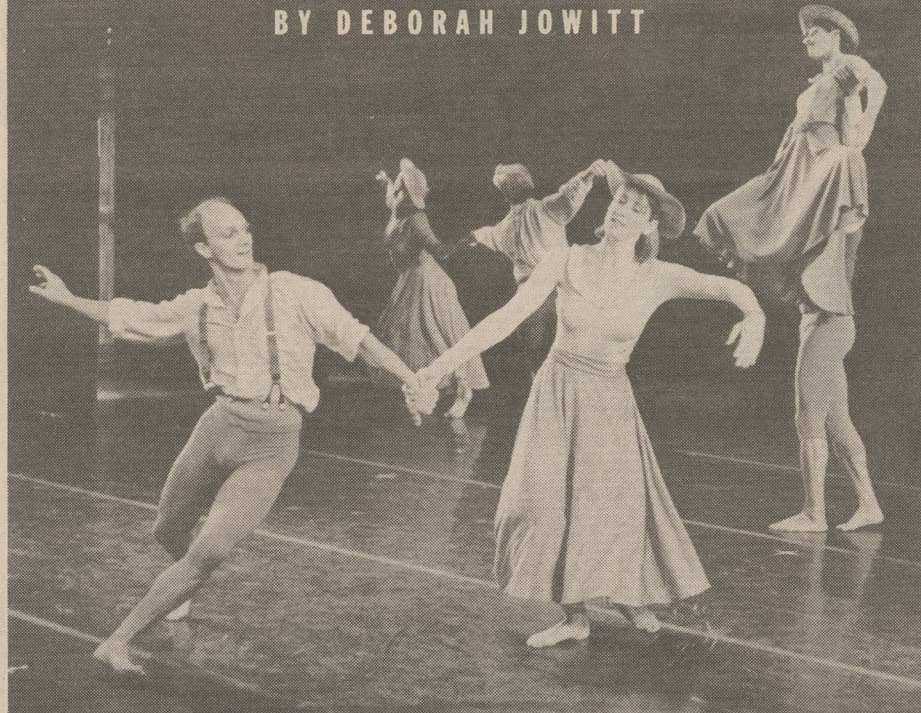
At Jacob's Pillow, Morris and his 12-person company presented two new pieces made recently in Seattle, where Morris is now based. The first of these, to Schubert's *The Shepherd on the Rock* (lusciously performed, on tape, by an unidentified singer), fits roughly into a category familiar to regional ballet audiences: love-struck pas de deux overlap, occasionally splitting into solos or flowing together into ensemble passages. But Morris's dance is as memorable as most of those in the genre are forgettable. For one thing, the dancers aren't standardized. Wearing glasses for this one, David Landis masks his power with a suggestion of Schubertian shyness. Long Nguyen has elegantly ardent dancing and exotic looks. Donald Mouton's gray hair and compact, athletic style set him apart. One woman is lanky (Jennifer Thienes), one sturdy (Ruth Davidson), one physically delicate and temperamentally robust (Teri Weksler). Together they form a community that is absorbing to watch. All fine dancers, they show you steps, not technique.

The style is bucolic. The women's straw hats, their print dresses of no particular fashion make them look like years-ago German country girls in their Sunday best, out with their beaux. There's something innocent and faintly awkward about their raptures. The men may lift their partners, but they don't manipulate them. Indeed, more often the partnering work makes the women look capable and enveloping, with the men weaving intricately around them, stooping to pass under their arms, getting pleasantly tangled up in them.

As the duets cede to solo passages and ensemble work, the stage begins to seem like a big meadow or public park. Couples disappear and romp back through with a reprise of their duets. The way motifs recur in slightly different guises is, of course, a formal device. Morris makes it heady, as if the steps were acting on the dancers like May wine. Only a short pause separates all this summery charm from Morris's 1983 *Dogtown* to a selec-

Pleasures of Summer

BY DEBORAH JOWITT



Mark Morris's *The Shepherd on the Rock*

tion of Yoko Ono's rowdy, yet delicate, keening songs. Now Thienes, Davidson, and Landis, joined by Susan Hadley, Penny Hutchinson, Tina Fehlandt, and Guillermo Resto, are stylishly doggy—funny and frightening at the same time. Now nothing flows, everything is punched out, angular, casually brutish. In *Western Symphony*, Balanchine set classical steps into square-dance formations and applied a touch of Hollywood "West" spice. Morris does almost the opposite: he draws quite a lot of his aggressive steps from dog behavior—crawling, pawing, rolling over, humping—but he sets them in impeccable patterns and rhythms. One long, slow canon that travels on a diagonal becomes unaccountably touching. These people clearly relish their dogginess, but they're trapped in it too. After intermission, Fehlandt, Hutchinson, Morris, Nguyen, Thienes, and Keith Sabado return with something completely different. *Ballabili* (to music from *Aida*) is a hilarious send-up of opera ballet—with perhaps a gentle smack or two at Denishawn Egyptiana. The jokes are stock: horrid black wigs and tunics that manage to be both gaudy and dowdy, resolutely two-dimensional parades, pious ritual gestures, prissy ballet solos, and such choreographic fancies as you-go-up-while-I-go-down. But the dance is more than just a skit to entertain

an audience in the know; the comedy comes as much through rhythmic surprises and spatial turn-arounds as through the jokes; it's a surprisingly rich little piece.

By the time Morris and Weksler had performed the chilling *One Charming Night* and 10 dancers had made the stage all but soar up into the Berkshire sky with Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Morris had the au-

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dience thoroughly entranced.

A different sort of excitement was generated by Liz Lerman's lecture-demos on the Pillow's "Inside/Out" series. Her small, D.C.-based company's currently attempting to create a "ritual" in response to an unlikely suggestion thrown out by the Human Interference Task Force for the Office of Nuclear Waste Isolation. The problem, as the task force sees it, is how to make people who've presumably lost their ability to read and understand languages avoid nuclear waste dumps for the 10,000 years it takes the stuff to neutralize. Well. There were many questions, and they didn't have a lot to do with dance.

During her second week, Lerman showed some of the work she'd been doing with people from the Lee [Massachusetts] Senior Center. With dancers from the Lee Senior Center. What's so fine about Lerman's approach to teaching those over 60 is a lack of the condescension that so many dance people show to anyone not between puberty and 40, or with a less-than-ideal body. Her poised and apparently at-ease students, dressed in ordinary comfortable clothes, demonstrated various exercises (composing, say, a phrase for arms and torso that all could perform seated on chairs). They also paired up with Lerman dancers Beth Davis, Jeff Bliss, and Don Zuckerman and with selected Jacob's Pillow students to improvise duets. I loved the affection and efficiency with which the two groups worked together, neither differences in age nor in physical skills interfering with their collaboration. The demonstration ended with a moving excerpt from Lerman's *Still Crossing*, reviewed by Burt Supree a couple of weeks ago. So what if, in the informality of the studio, we could see that a woman or two had to be helped up after she finished rolling across the floor? That was okay too, and while they rolled, they were as simple and as steady and as powerful as the sea.

Other surprises. The predictably delightful show put on by the American Ballroom Theater was prefaced by Jim Self's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, made for students in this summer's Ballet Project. Using seductive music from Gluck's *Orfeo*, Self created a curious little ballet—frankly emotional and with a sweetness and slight awkwardness that made me think of James Waring's works. There are some quite literal moments—while Orpheus (Jan-Erik Wikstrom) watches in horror, his elegantly coltish Eurydice (Marie-Josée Dubois) dies sadly, clutching her belly, and then rises to bourrée away backward with a swarm of veiled and tutued spirits who look like benevolent wilis. Other images are more mysterious: two-decker male Blessed Spirits (one sitting on another's shoulders); a surrogate Orpheus sitting with a duplicate Eurydice draped over his lap, as if the angels were practicing human suffering. A flawed but intriguing work and one that stimulated the students to solid and unaffected performing.

The following week, anything following the superb Pilar Rioja ("The Queen of Spain," Supree, *Voice*, August 5) would have been anticlimactic, but in the Mandala Folk Dance Ensemble's mixed bag of well-performed Middle Eastern and American dances, was one stunner: the *Vrlicko Kolo* from Dalmatia (choreography by J. Steven Murillo after Z. Ljeva-
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