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Mark Morris Is an Original In World of Modern Dance

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Every now and then the dance world explodes with a new talent, be it a dancer or a choreographer. The latest one to excite critics and audiences alike is 29-year-old Mark Morris, who has become one of the bright lights in the world of modern dance.

TV viewers will get a chance to view his works in an hour-long "Great Performances" tonight at 9 on Channels 3 and 30. The choreographer-dancer and his small company (he likes to keep the number down to about a dozen, and some of his dancers have been with him since the beginning) are featured in a collection of dances that range from a quirky abstract work titled "Dogtown," with music by Yoko Ono, to a passionate solo by Morris to Handel's music.

Dance magazines have done articles about Morris in which they label him exciting, innovative and electric. He is smart enough and has been dancing for a living long enough not to allow this heavy barrage of praise to go to his head. He notes that some critics don't understand his work at all and have been less than nice to him in print.

Success or acceptance amounts to being able to take more taxis, Mor-

ris flippantly admits. He says the notoriety has given him an added responsibility, but it also makes it possible to do bigger and more expensive projects.

"I'm not devoid of anxiety," Morris added. "TV is not the most ideal showcase for dancers. I think this particular program was well-done and the dancers performed at the top of their form. However, there is nothing that replaces the live performance. Dance should be experienced live. There is no substitute."

Morris did say he felt that television does give those who can't get to a live dance performance an opportunity to have part of the experience. However, he strongly added that television is not the future of dance. At best, it serves as a record of dance and that's valuable in itself.

Morris can't recall when he wasn't interested in dancing. However, his real dancing education started when he was 14 and joined a Balkan dance group in his native Seattle. Three years later, he was off to Spain to study flamenco dancing. When he returned, he danced with various companies (Lar Lubovitch, Eliot Feld and Laura Dean) but he always had the idea to form his own company and create his own dances. This became a reality in 1980 and his rise to national

prominence was fairly swift.

He was in New York recently to work on a new ballet for the Joffrey Ballet Company, which premieres at the end of the month. He is also interested in doing more ballet for opera.

Although his company has toured India and some European cities, he thinks it's not necessary to gain a reputation in Europe in order to succeed in the United States.

Mark Morris is an original, there is no doubt of that. His dances are a mixture of many things and he refuses to settle into one style. Each dance has an energy of its own and it's that individuality and unpredictability that comes closest to being the Mark Morris style.