

TV notes

A treat for Mark Morris fans

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

Choreographer Mark Morris is to the 1980s what Twyla Tharp was to the 1970s — an offbeat spirit channeling dance in a highly personal direction, and taking us along for the ride.

Morris, 29, is based in Seattle — which in itself makes him unusual in the New York-dominated dance world. But his travels have brought him to Boston a few times; he's performed here with his own company and last season he created a sensational work, "Mort Subite," for the Boston Ballet. He has earned an enthusiastic public here.

For both Morris fans and the curious, "Mark Morris," a Dance in America presentation airing at 9 tonight on Channel 2, will be a treat. Morris is that rarity, a choreographer whose work comes across well on television, which heightens the intimate feel of even his grander conceits.

The show is blessedly short on those choreographer-at-leisure scenes that take time away from the point, which is to show choreography. We do see Morris cooking in his mom's kitchen, and shopping for fish. The main revelations here are that he started flamenco dancing at age 9, inspired by Jose Greco.

As a choreographer, Morris wallows in his own physicality and that of his dancers, creating oozing, swirling phrases of movement that suggest dancers re-

sponding to each tiny impulse of their bodies. He wallows, too, in the music he uses, which ranges from Vivaldi to Yoko Ono, but is always lush and theatrical.

In "Songs That Tell a Story (Robe of White)," to country music by the Louvin Brothers, Morris tosses his dark, Caravaggio-style curls in a gesture of impish arrogance, a gesture that is almost a signature.

"I never had any trouble with being a boy and wanting to dance," Morris says. The encouragement and support he's enjoyed during a career as a performer with several fine New York companies and then as head of his own group, shows in his work, which has a sunny air.

Even in a dance like the solo "Jealousy," where Morris wraps his arms around himself or curls his body into a tense knot, as if consumed by the overwhelming emotion, we are still conscious of the luscious exuberance of his movement. The most outwardly negative work in this show is "Dogtown," set to Yoko Ono songs. Here the dancers treat each other with mechanical brutality, literally stepping on each other at times.

But even here the message seems not so much "Isn't everything awful," as "Let's try to prevent things from being awful." The choreographer himself introduces the work by saying that art can be ugly if the point is just the opposite.

More typical of Morris' sweet sensibility is the duet "Love, You Have Won," in which Morris and company member Guillermo Resto look like a pair of choir boys playing hooky.

Their movement ranges from skips and swoops, to a take-off of court dance, to ballet steps softened into puffy little gestures where pointed feet and stretched knees have no place. The two often perform together, their gestures as well coordinated as a pair of egg beaters. This is the Mark Morris the dance world has come to cherish.