

# Mark Morris brings many accolades to BAM

He's been called the most promising heir of the modern dance greats and most important choreographer since Twyla Tharp. He was included in "Esquire" magazine's list of American movers and shakers under age 40 and had his own segment on public television's "Dance in America" series, one of only two (Tharp was the other) post-modern choreographers so privileged. Two weeks ago, his first ballet for The Joffrey and his company's upcoming season at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (beginning Wednesday) prompted a five-minute profile on NBC's "Today Show." Just 30 years old, he's been the darling of American dance critics for nearly five years.

What makes Mark Morris so special? A few very basic, but rare qualities: Excellent choreographic craftsmanship, consummate musically, and, most importantly, a fantastic imagination. The latter has fueled an output that makes Morris hard to stereotype. Although chronologically a post-modern, Morris has something in his opus for everyone, from traditionalists to punkers. As readily as he makes plotless

dance to familiar classical music, he can produce astute, sometimes outrageous reflections on the raunchy or maudlin or tender themes of pop and folk.

How does Morris do it? His diversity can be traced to his training and performing experience. Serious flamenco studies as a child, Balkan folk dance in adolescence, apprenticeships with the Feld Ballet, Lar Bubovitch, Hannah Kahn, Twyla Tharp and Laura Dean in his late teens and early '20s.

Morris' success also is keyed to his avoidance of formula. He isn't afraid to do the unexpected, as evidenced by "Esteemed Guests" his first work for The Joffrey. At its New York premiere last month, the work appeared too simple and severe for a Morris ballet and some critics suggested that perhaps choreographing for a famous ballet company had constricted Morris' range. Did he feel some compunction to be decorous in creating for a famous ballet company? No, he insists. "It was my choice. The dancers had been warned that I'd have them rolling all over the floor naked but I didn't want to do that."



**Tullia Limarzi**

DANCE

Morris' greatest gift, perhaps, is his ability to hear music more keenly than anyone of his generation (he's been compared to George Balanchine, perhaps the highest compliment a choreographer can receive, for his adeptness at making movement that seems to flow organically from its accompaniment). And he hears it on two levels, the formal and the impressionist. A music-inspired fantasy is very often the departure point for Morris choreography.

He relishes the challenge of a powerful score. "Stabat Mater," for example, the large-scale work that will be the centerpiece of his BAM season, is danced to Pergo-

lesi's setting of the Latin prayer. "I used the music because I thought it would make a good dance," says Morris, "and there's no reason to avoid its religious connotation."

Fascinated by the text of the score as well as the music, Morris doesn't shy away from its implications — "you can't deny the text about Mary sobbing at the foot of the cross." When music and words conflict, he sets to tone: "Some of the music sounds as if Pergolesi never read the text," he notes. "The most horrible part is set to the happiest sounding music. I interpreted some of this as an hysterical reaction."

The BAM concert will be all baroque, including "Pieces En Concert" performed to music of Francois Couperin and "Marble Halls" set to J.S. Bach's "Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C Minor." All three works be performed on period instruments by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble with "Stabat Mater" featuring two of America's most acclaimed baroque signers, countertenor Drew Minter and soprano Julianne Baird. The Couperin piece, a trio, will feature Morris

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himself, a big man with a sinuous body whose stage persona might best be described as ardent. "Marble Halls" and "Stabat Mater" are group works that display his troupe, all excellent dancers with diverse and distinctive personalities and body types.

While the Mark Morris Dance Group plays the Brooklyn Academy of Music Opera House, The Joffrey will perform "Esteemed Guests" this week at City Center on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday evenings. How has such far-flung celebrity affected Morris? He's gotten choreographic commission

from the Boston Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, the Seattle Opera and others. But he is still based in Seattle, his hometown, performing, and teaching at the University of Washington to mitigate the pressures of the New York scene. Most important, according to Morris, "I'm happy that people watch my dances and take them seriously."

Does he think success may spoil him? "It's too late. I was spoiled long before I was successful. You have to be some sort of showoff or you wouldn't be a performer."

## At the movies

Comments taken from Advance movie reviews for films now playing on Staten Island

Harvard Law School. Rated PG-13. "Occasionally funny, occasionally tastesless, generally

one needs to soak in now and then."

Gentleman' but the dogfights are beautifully photographed."

**Thomson** — **Mike Ockrent**  
has had his ups, downs

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Pound I knew a bit but never got along with. He liked being helpful. He liked being at the center of