

Morris' dances are tributes to music

By Barbara Zuck

Dispatch Music and Dance Critic

At first you think it may be just a fluke, but the more you watch Mark Morris' dances the more you conclude that he is first and foremost a music lover's choreographer. Or, perhaps, Morris is a music lover who happens to be a choreographer.

In the Columbus debut of the Mark Morris Dance Company last night in Mershon Auditorium, it was music that maintained center stage. Many, maybe most choreographers are inspired at some level by the music they choose to work with, but Morris creates entire dances in tribute to music.

In last night's program, these tributes ranged from outright mockery to humble homage. The concert opened with *Canonic 3/4 Studies*, a delicious parody of the downbeat.

A SEEMINGLY endless medley of waltzes and other piano works in simple triple meter lead Morris to ridiculous physical extremes. Predictable little musical forms translate into predictable little dances comprised of unpredictable movement vocabulary.

A *pas de deux* visually acting out the canon in the music finds the male dancer forever two steps behind the female partner he is trying to lift. In another, the dancers seem so frustrated by the slavery to the inevitable emphasis on 1-2-3, 1-2-3, all they can do is slam their feet on the ground.

The work is a brilliant exaggeration of music's subtleties, and a subtle use of exaggeration.

BUT MORRIS takes his Vivaldi more seriously, if no less

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inventively. The program's culminating work was Vivaldi's *Gloria*. In the beautiful *Et in terra pax* movement, Morris explains counterpoint to the audience in a new and strangely expressive way.

The company lies prone on the floor. At each sighing entrance of the chorus, a dancer creeps forward, then another moves, then another. The end of a phrase is symbolized by a dancer flipping over on his back, then flopping temporarily in repose on his belly. Occasionally, a dancer stands and soars as the music takes flight.

With such common man-gestures Morris makes his dances, but they are gestures we have never seen in this context. In *Gloria*, Morris seems to be worshipping the music that worships God in such simple terms that the simplicity becomes eloquent.

A similar spirit imbues the wonderfully moving *Strict Songs*, to Lou Harrison's *Four Strict Songs*, which are based on Hopi Indian chants about nature. Morris' movement vocabulary only occasionally moves into something virtuosic, and last night it tended to do so most here, especially in a series of intricately twisting leaps.

Certainly the comic high point of the evening was found in *Deck of Cards*, three vignettes to country-and-western songs. I'd like to try to explain how the star of the show was a semi-truck, but I think you would have had to be there.