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DANCE REVIEW/Barbara Figge Fox

Morris troupe dances with integrity

PRINCETON — McCarter Theatre's near capacity audience last Saturday laughed so heartily for the first two dances, that it was hard to imagine taking the Mark Morris Dance Company seriously. "Canonic 3/4 Studies," danced to absurdly trite, doggedly regular piano waltzes, spun balletic tradition askew in Edward Gorey fashion.

"Deck of Cards" set schmaltzy country ballads to solos for Guillermo Resto as a wronged woman, Donald Mouton as a hapless soldier, and Mark Morris impersonating, by remote control, a toy truck. (After his foot injury in November, Morris has not yet resumed performing.)

From seeing several of Morris' concerts, I am convinced of his integrity, that he is working to choreograph each piece of music with authenticity. If he is dancing "snide," his dance is truly snide, if "offensive," it is very revolting,

indeed.

In his "Gloria," to Vivaldi's inspiring, full-length "Gloria in D," I found his choreography religiously uplifting. Mark Morris does not profess a particular religion; he dedicates his concerts to his mother (by name) and to god, with a small g.

YET HE interprets each section of Latin words with stunning accuracy. In Sabado's "Miserere" solo he writhes with anguish while the others pass briskly by on the other side. In a penitential pilgrimage, they solemnly clasp hands under one thigh, unable to stand perfectly erect. Or prostrate themselves, using their elbows to propel their bodies onto the stage.

Ruth Davidson, Tina Fehlandt, Susan Hadley, Penny Hutchinson, David Landis, Jon Mensinger, Mouton, Resto, and Teri Weksler were in the excellent cast.

In Saturday's program substitution, the company offered a month-old piece, "Four Strict Songs," commissioned by the Seattle Men's Chorus, set to Lou Harrison's music. The dancers have dedicated it to the memory of Liberace, because, as one confided, they value his generous spirit.

With earnest expansiveness, they performed the energetic patterns — leaping, circling, turning. Rarely acknowledging the audience, they remained engrossed in the gentle, sustained ripples of movement through their bodies and through their group patterns.

Near the end, four dancers lay on their backs, their feet in the air, providing the foundation for partners to balance, to suspend themselves. Just at the close, they took positions with heads forward, arms outstretched, like silent airplanes. Or angels.