

# Dance: Mark Morris

By JENNIFER DUNNING

**R**OLAND BARTHES explores the mythic underpinnings of everyday rituals in "Mythologies," finding signs and symbols in the most ordinary of experiences. Three of his essays served as inspiration for Mark Morris's "Mythologies," an evening of recent dances presented by the Mark Morris Dance Group on Friday at the Manhattan Center's Grand Ballroom. But Mr. Morris, though a master of the kind of telling exaggeration about which the French semiotologist writes, reverses the process of Mr. Barthes's exploration. In collaboration with his impressive dancers and Herschel Garfein, a composer, he constructs a world of inseparable spectacle and symbol.

We are primed for spectacle from the start by the presence of a strolling cabaret singer and by the magnificent Grand Ballroom itself. Foam, bubbles and a troubled housewife interact in "Soap-Powders and Detergents," the closest of the dances to the style and substance of the essays. A cowboy, a motorcycle moll and a sexy devil saunter out of their clothes in "Striptease," and bodies thwack and maul their way grandiloquently through "Championship Wrestling."

A good many things are going on in "Soap-Powders," among them a wash cycle and a witty sendup of advertising. The inventive, precisely crafted suds choruses linger a little too long in a Busby Berkeley lineup toward the end. But Mr. Morris has managed to combine the funny and heroic here, characteristically, in a strangely powerful and exquisitely beautiful dance for Penny Hutchinson, David Landis and a line of dancers wielding white sheets to form a curtain that frames and hides Ms. Hutchinson as she travels by in an unforgettable image.

But Mr. Morris goes a dark and prophetic step further in "Striptease" and "Championship Wrestling." Both Mr. Barthes and Mr. Morris comment on the desexualization inherent in the act of stripping. Interestingly, Mr. Barthes refers only to women, but Mr. Morris's strippers are male and female. The dancers



Beatriz Schiller

Mark Morris performing in "Striptease."

are funny and exotic as they enact standard characters in pornography. But there is a heroic cast to the moving frieze of progressively more naked men and women. Bodies are exhilaratingly released with the un-snapping of a bra and pulling-down of trousers. The strippers who start as an exclusive community and then come forward in enactments of our fantasies are strangely empty shadow-humans by the end. And a voice cries out "America" in the taped crowd sounds that accompanies "Championship Wrestling," as

the wrestlers wander listlessly out of battle.

This distinctively individual company also includes Rob Besserer, Ruth Davidson, Tina Fehlandt, Susan Hadley, Jon Mensinger, Mr. Morris, Donald Mouton, Guillermo Resto, Keith Sabado and Teri Weksler. Phil Sandstrom designed the powerful lighting, and Mr. Garfein was present to conduct the singers and orchestra. Julie Cascioppo seems not to have decided just how campy she wants her cabaret act to get, but she was skillfully accompanied by Linda Dowdell.