

Morris dancers evoke warmth, humor

DANCE REVIEW

By Frances Schools
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The members of the Mark Morris Dance Group don't look like dancers, they don't move like dancers, and most of the time, it is difficult to distinguish males and females. But much of this is the master plan of Mark Morris, for it makes his group like no other.

While the movements may not be precisionlike and graceful, the dancers do move and move well. The choreography is exacting, demanding and requires tremendous strength and control from the dancers. Each moves simply yet powerfully, unassumingly yet impressively. And the total effect gives this group the uniqueness for which Morris is known.

The program at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts opened with "Celestial Greetings," a light and pleasant work set to popular Thai music. There is much Oriental movement, a strong influence from the marital arts, and a good bit of T'ai Chi. There was a serenity of feeling in the mood created.

The brightly humorous spot of the night was "Deck of Cards," the only piece in which Morris himself appeared. Performed to three country music songs by Jimmy Logsdon, George Jones and T. Texas Tyler, it was campy, down-to-earth humor that tickled everyone's funny bone.

Star of the Logsdon song about a trucker and his misadventure involving a blonde and a flat tire was an electronically run tractor-trailer truck. As the song unfolded its sad tale, the little truck with its powerful high beam lights maneuvered all about the stage.

Morris appeared in drag as the girl in the Jones song, and what a woman he was. Morris, a heavy-set man, was attired in a coral chiffon dress. He had no need for a wig since his own thick, curly hair worked just fine. His beautifully feminine movements as he acted out the love ballad was camp in its purest form. And the audience ate it up!

Rounding out this trio was Donald Mouton dancing to the Tyler song which compares a deck of cards to the Bible. Dressed in a military jacket and hat, boxer shorts, and black socks and shoes, he acted out the story with hilarious results.

"Strict Songs" is a very somber work performed to the music of Lou Harris. The dancers moved smoothly over the stage, creating many patterns and groupings, giving an effect of relationships coming and going. Commissioned by the Seattle Men's Chorus, this soothing work has been dedicated to the memory of Liberace.

The program concluded with "Gloria," performed to Vivaldi's "Gloria in D." Morris' interpretation of this very religious musical work is like no other interpretation. There is the feeling of emotions being drawn upon by a spiritual being as the dancers seem pulled to a stronger power. There is a hint of nearly every emotion experienced by humans, and often these expressions seem to be derived from Far Eastern origins.

Morris and his dancers are unique in their style. There is strength in their performance and an enjoyment in seeing interpretations that dare to be different.

The Mark Morris Dance Group will appear again tonight at 8 o'clock as part of the Fast/Forward series presented by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.