

Morris' skill is multi-layered

By H.B. KRONEN

BECKET — Mark Morris was on stage twice Tuesday night when his company opened its run at Jacob's Pillow. First he appeared as a woman, then as some baroque figure at war with itself.

Choreographically, Morris reminds one of a younger, postmodern Paul Taylor. But his personal movement style would have made Isadora Duncan proud — that pioneer modern who was far more interested in exhibiting her strength and exposing her soul than in any confining technique.

Morris is on stage in an orange dress and high heels in the second section of "Deck of Cards," his country-western narrative. He delicately takes off his heels, his dark curls cascading, eyes shadowed, legs bulging, center softening.

Even as George Jones croons "Darlin', say it's not you," he is not camping it up. He has too much strength and dignity and sinewy lyricism for that.

And he relinquishes none of his

Review

maleness as he assumes the female. He is presenting a self-image theatrically magnified, and that is a different process than simply putting oneself forward. There is another step involved, the choosing and careful construction of an image to be presented. It is not unlike the posturing reflected in Ted Shawn's portrait above the stage. The artifice is fundamental.

The layering of gender is something he brings to his group choreography as well.

His company, 12 dancers in addition to himself, is remarkably shaped. There isn't the expected relationship in body type between men and women. Several of the women are large with impressively muscular builds, many of the men slight.

Tina Fehlandt, in particular, ap-

pears on stage as a female (not feminine) equivalent of Morris, with highly developed thighs and strong, androgynous face. Donald Mouton is another important presence in the company.

These are qualities that Morris clearly seeks and uses. Gender is a constant conscientious factor in his work.

His work is beautiful and generous. He has a facile lyricism, smart musicality and skilled sense of dynamic structure.

He uses dance history with sure knowledge and invention. His experience with a Balkan folk dance ensemble has clearly informed his choreography, both structurally (he openly and repetitively uses folk dance formations) and dynamically in the forceful connection between the foot and the ground.

"My Party" is little more than folk dances smarted up in petticoats for the stage and the times, but the same early dance formations are used brilliantly in "New Love Song Waltzes," a piece drenched in the very juice of dance to 15 lieder waltzes by Brahms.

The combinations of bodies and the transitions from one place to another, one mien to another, are startling in their sophistication against the immediacy of the movement.

"Strict Songs" is the newest dance on the program, recently choreographed and dedicated to the memory of Liberace, "because we all admire him, his warmth and spirit," said Barry Alterman, the general manager of the company.

The music is large and liturgical, sung by the Seattle Men's Chorus and composed by Lou Harrison from Hopi Indian chants. The dance, also using folk formations, is an exultation. Morris contrasts large, ritualistic and small, cryptic motions, wild and bound movement much as the music juxtaposes percussive and choral sounds. The dancers come together like ancient fighters meeting.

The Mark Morris Dance Group will continue in performance at the Pillow through tomorrow. Performances are at 8:30 tonight and tomorrow, with a matinee tomorrow at 2 p.m. For further information and reservations, call the Jacob's Pillow box office at 243-0745.

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