

Clown prince has dark side

■ **Mark Morris Dance Group** at Meany Theater, last night through tomorrow night at 8 (\$13-\$19; 543-4880).

by **Wayne Lee**
Special to The Times

Much of dancer/choreographer Mark Morris' meteoric rise to fame over the past two years can be credited to his truly eccentric sense of humor. He parodies, poses, distorts, exaggerates and otherwise uses movement to make us laugh at ourselves and our various dance conventions.

That gaily mocking persona appears to be cracking though. Last night's Meany Theater concert by the Mark Morris Dance Group showed a darker, more somber side to the clown prince of dance. His two world premieres, made during his just concluded Summer Dance Intensive residency at the University of Washington, revealed a seriousness seldom seen in his other works.

"The Fantasy," named after Mozart's weighted Fantasy in C minor, was a fearsome portrait of five very scared, very insecure individuals. Dressed like waifs in ugly, cut-off cotton shirts and pants, the five clutched desperately at one another, repeatedly grabbed their throats, retreated, fell heavily to the floor and always focused on some unseen force to which they were inexorably drawn.

It was only on rare occasions that one of the dancers was able to break free from the group and move lightly, gracefully, beautifully. Too soon, each was back with the others on that painful path toward — what? Death?

The other premiere was "Sonata For Clarinet and Piano" to music by Poulenc. The piece has a five-couple chorus performing fast, complicated group movements and unison coupling. The tone, for the most part, is cold, precise, bleak. Morris, as the soloist, drifts in and out of the geometric patterns, apart, alone, isolated.

These two new dances — if we can take them at face value — show us a Mark Morris who apparently is concerned with loneliness, fear and, ultimately, love. There are few gimmicks used, only scattered jokes, no sight gags.

That was not the case with the other three works, each seen here for the first time. "Canonic 3/4 Studies," the curtain-raiser, was a hilarious send-up of ballet exercises and etudes. Harriet Cavalli arranged and played the various waltzes with perfect aplomb.

Teri Weksler was wonderful in "Bijoux," danced to nine little songs by Satie. The character study had Weksler dressed in a pink satin gown, showing the eccentricities and unpredictabilities of a highly mannered cabaret queen.

"New Love Song Waltzes" closed the evening. The 10-person dance, performed to Brahms' Neue Liebeslieder Walzer, used awkward, clumsy, athletic and pedestrian movements to paint a picture of love that was entertaining, but unsettling.