

Brussels invitation opens doors for Morris

by Melinda Bargreen
Times music critic

"I have the time and the music," says Mark Morris, "and that's exactly what I need. This is all pretty amazing."

Morris, the Seattle native who has become the hottest choreographer of the '80s, is in New York coping with incoming phone calls about the The Mark Morris Dance Company's invitation to become the resident dance company of the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, one of



Mark Morris will return for Seattle Opera commitments.

Europe's most distinguished opera and ballet theater companies, and the former home of Maurice Bejart's respected Ballet of the 20th Century. That invitation, extended by theater director Gerard Mortier and accepted by Morris, is expected to be confirmed next week by the Brussels board.

"I want to make it clear I'm not filling in for Bejart," Morris added. "I'm not a substitute. We're the real thing."

The Brussels invitation came during a Stuttgart residency,

when Mortier approached Morris backstage and asked him to come to Brussels during a day off in the company's schedule. Morris and company manager Barry Alterman were dazzled with what they call "an unbelievable rehearsal complex with offices, video equipment and a canteen, and three great theaters to perform in, including an amazing 1,100-seat opera house."

The Brussels invitation took a

Please see **DANCE** on C 5

DANCE

continued from C 1

great deal of thought, according to Alterman.

"It means a lot of dislocation," he said. "We're the oldest dance company on earth — we're 33, 34, 35, not kids. There are wives and husbands to consider. Everything is changed. We'll be doing about 40 shows a season, and hiring more dancers; we'll probably have a company of about 20 the first year."

Among the changes will be a move to Brussels, where the company will spend at least six months a year, and Morris may spend seven or eight.

"I'm really going to move there," he said. "I'll have to. There will be times when the dancers can be in New York, but I'll have to be in Brussels. I am supposed to do two or three new works a season. The first will be a full-evening-length piece, Handel's 'L'Allegro ed il Penseroso'. I'm definitely talking to them about directing opera."

"But I'll still have my trips to Seattle. The honeymoon is over

with the University of Washington (where Morris and his company have done workshops and residencies), but we'll still be coming to Seattle a lot. I'm doing a lot of things for Seattle Opera, too, including 'Orpheus and Eurydice' in January, and I'm going to direct 'Die Fledermaus' in May."

What will the "Orpheus" choreography be like?

"I have no idea," laughs Morris, who is famous for his last-minute spontaneity and the spurts of new ideas that last all the way through the rehearsal and performance process. Among his new projects is the new John Adams opera, "Nixon in China," with stage direction by wunderkind director Peter Sellars; Morris calls it "an unbelievably good opera, totally perfect for the voice, and it's going to be just sensational."

"What I love about Brussels," he says, "is that this isn't just a paycheck and a dental plan — which it is, by the way — but also a way to give myself enough rope. I work carefully, but I make up a lot of things, and a dance could be anything — anything. I don't have to worry about making every dance a giant crowd pleaser. I can do what I really want to do, what I believe in."

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