

Dancers In Benefit For AIDS

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

TWO years in the making, "Dancing for Life" turned out to be one of the smoothest-run benefit performances in New York history — thanks to Jerome Robbins's supervision — and also one of the most emotionally stirring.

Thirteen major American dance companies joined forces last night at the New York State Theater to raise funds for research, care and education related to AIDS. To excited cheers, Mikhail Baryshnikov announced in a curtain speech that the projected goal of \$1.4-million had been reached.

Perhaps the last movement of George Balanchine's ballet to Bizet's "Symphony in C," which closed the evening with principals from four different ballet companies leading each section, best symbolized the prevailing mood of unity.

Despite the glamour provided by the black-tie audience, which included personalities from the film, fashion, financial and cultural worlds, the tone was relatively low-key.

There was a new work: a section of Mark Morris's "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes" that featured Mr. Baryshnikov and that will be presented in a fuller version next year by American Ballet Theater. There were also novelties, in that familiar passages from various companies were sometimes juxtaposed under composer headings.

It was no accident that an audience that had come to help victims of acquired immune deficiency syndrome reserved its roars for the heart of the program. This was the male duet — extraordinarily well danced by Sylvain Lafortune and Rick Michalek of the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company — from Mr. Lubovitch's modern-dance piece to Mozart, "Concerto Six Twenty-Two." The duet is about caring, and support.

The dancing led off with an excerpt from Laura Dean's "Magnetic." Zeena Parkins and Eleanor Sandresky were the onstage musicians on electric keyboards.

The Joffrey Ballet's Dawn Caccamo and Glenn Edgerton took us into another world with the lyrical duet from Gerald Arpino's "Ketten-tanz," set to music by Johann Strauss the elder. It was back to the future with Merce Cunningham's dancers in a section from his "Fabrications," accompanied by a sound that resembled wind in the catacombs. Four couples from the Eliot Feld company performed the last movement of Mr. Feld's new "Embraced Waltzes," with Peter Longiaru playing Chopin on the piano.

Three companies danced to Bach: Mr. Morris's dancers, barelegged and in shorts, offered the first section of his "Marble Halls," conducted by Robert Irving, while the second movement of Balanchine's "Concerto Barocco" was led by Christina Johnson and Bernard McClain and a corps that smiled appealingly throughout. The last movement of the same concerto proved startlingly and wonderfully out of context when Paul Taylor's dancers did their Kamikaze act, throwing themselves to the floor in the last section of "Esplanade," conducted by Donald York.

Jonathan McPhee conducted the healing ritual — Martha Graham's ingenious use of her technique class as a metaphor for the sunrise and sunset sections of Carl Nielsen's Helios Overture.

Dudley Williams was his giving self as the soloist in the Alvin Ailey dance "A Song For You," and Twyla Tharp did her incomparable drunk act leading her company in two dances from "Eight Jelly Rolls." A Mozart diptych included Mr. Lubovitch's excerpt, conducted by Ransom Wilson, and the New York City Ballet in the first movement of Balanchine's "Divertimento No. 15." Adam Luders and Kyra Nichols were spendid here.

The preview of Mr. Morris's work in progress, to music by Virgil Thomson played by Michael Boriskin on the piano, has a wonderful section, almost Spanish in accent, for Mr. Baryshnikov and Robert Hill. Most of the time, Mr. Baryshnikov is just one of the gang of 10 — Martine van Hamel, Kathleen Moore, Leslie Browne, Julio Bocca, Christine Dunham, Lucette Katerndahl, Robert Yearsley and Robert Wallace are the other eight. Witty in its shape and structure, the piece has possibilities.

Just before a mass curtain call that thickened as each company came out to take a bow, the audience saw Susan Jaffe of Ballet Theater begin the fourth movement of "Symphony in C." The corps from the City Ballet joined in, and the other leads were the Joffrey's Leslie Carothers and Ashley Wheeler, the City Ballet's Merrill Ashley and Jock Soto and Dance Theater of Harlem's Virginia Johnson and Donald Williams.

The chairmen of the event, which included a post-performance dinner dance on the theater's promenade, were Anne Bass and Nan Kempner, with the chairmen of the dance companies as co-chairmen. Judith Peabody, the Dance Theater of Harlem's chairman and a figure in the forefront of AIDS care, said, "It is wonderful the dance companies have come together for this program, but we have to realize that this disease is everywhere and it is misleading to emphasize somehow that this is a disease of the arts. It is time for the sports world and others to mobilize as well."

Weekend makes Friday even better.