

Dance Wunderkind 'Endures' Success

"People who don't even know me come to see my work now. It's incredible."
— Mark Morris on his 1986 Dance in America television special.

By Carole Mazur

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Will success spoil Mark Morris? "I'm at least enduring it," the current choreographic wunderkind said during a brief telephone interview from Riverside, Calif. last week.

Dance Magazine has touted the 31-year-old choreographer/dancer as the heir apparent among American modern choreographers. Last December, The New Yorker called him "Choreographer of the Year." And in a recent profile People magazine declared, "Mark Morris is in."

In addition to creating three to nine works a year for his own 13-member Mark Morris Dance Group, the choreographer now does commissions for bigger companies — "Mort Subite" for the Boston Ballet in 1985 and "Esteemed Guests" for the Joffrey in 1986. When the new opera "Nixon in China" debuted in Houston two weeks ago, Morris' second act ballet received prominent mentions along with John Adams' music and Peter Sellars' direction.

Nancy Luecke, promotional director of Albuquerque's KiMo Theatre, said she and Marge Neset, director of the city's Cultural Affairs Division, are glad they had the foresight two years ago to book Morris'

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP performs choreography by Morris to music by Vivaldi, Satie, Poulenc and Lou Harrison at 8 p.m. Friday at the KiMo Theatre, Fifth and Central NW. General admission tickets are \$8 and \$10, students \$7 and \$9. Call 848-1374 for reservations.

troupe for Friday's performance. The women said the Morris company's fees for next year are beyond what the KiMo could afford and still keep ticket prices reasonable.

But Morris denied being driven by a desire for money and publicity. "They have nothing to do with my choreography," he said. "If success means that you get to do what you want, of course I am (driven). I'd rather be happy than unhappy."

The spate of interviews that accompany Morris' publicity packet say the son of a Seattle high school teacher discovered at 6 that he was happiest when making up dances to classical music. At 9 he began weekly flamenco classes and later added formal ballet training. When he was 13, he joined a semi-professional Balkan dance group in his home town. After high school graduation, he moved to Spain to study flamenco — but he has told interviewers he lost interest in that art when the Spanish dancers failed to match the sophistication of his childhood hero, José Greco.

There's no way to know how much

MORE: See DANCE on PAGE G2



Mark Morris will perform with his dance company at the KiMo Theatre Friday.

Mark Morris will perform with his dance company at the KiMo Theatre Friday.

Sound locations in Albuquerque, Valley, Minn.

Dance Wunderkind Endures Success

CONTINUED FROM PAGE G1

flamenco has influenced his current dance style, Morris said: "It is part of everything else I do, everybody I've ever worked for, all the dances I've ever done ... what I've read, what I've seen, who I've talked to — I can't give a ratio of any kind."

Morris spent the second half of the 1970s dancing one after the other with the companies of Eliot Feld, Lar Lubovitch, Twyla Tharp, Hannah Kahn and Laura Dean. He started his Mark Morris Dancers in 1980 to feature his own choreography.

The prolific choreographer said he doesn't think about such things as "inspiration" as he composes dances. He described his working method as simply choosing a musical selection that he loves and crafting a dance to go with it.

Morris complained that many people think non-verbal works such as dance or music descend from heaven in clouds of inspiration to engulf the artist. "That's why Mozart was slandered in that horrible movie, 'Amadeus,' in which he was portrayed as this idiot savant who just received music whole," he said. "It (choreographing) is like doing anything else and I get better at it by doing it."

His choreography-as-job explanation has the same matter-of-fact ring as the late George Balanchine's oft-quoted description of his ballets as "just dancing."

In the "Dance in America" program, an excerpt from Morris' "Gloria" shows an ability akin to Balanchine's for weaving the steps for whole groups through and around the musical rhythm. However, whereas Balanchine's ballerinas move like sleek thoroughbreds, Morris' dancers hurtle about like workhorses with a penchant for precision.

Though Morris decried any search for a secret message or hidden agenda in his dances, many do have themes or stories. Audiences can also sense when he's being whimsical or serious, reviewers have said, adding that the two contrasting moods often comfortably coexist in Morris' works. Last year his pieces included "Soap Powders and Detergents," with white-suited dancers bubbling and churning through a homage to washday that Morris said was suggested by a Roland Barthes essay, and "Stabat Mater," in which the meditative Pergolesi music gave rise to the dance's religious images.

However, in the Dance in America segment of "Gloria," the kaleidoscopic steps capture the uplift of Vivaldi's music, but do not seem particularly religious until the final movement when the dancers simultaneously fall to the floor in the prone crucifixion position of meditating Carmelites.

Morris said the Albuquerque concert will include the full version of "Gloria." But he declined to explain or describe the programmed

dances. "This is how I express what I express," he said. "I think it's wrong and erroneous to change that (movement vocabulary) into words in English."

Besides "Gloria," the Albuquerque concert includes "Strict Songs," to Lou Harrison male choral works, "Bijoux," a woman's solo to Erik Satie music, and "Sonata for Clarinet and Piano," to music by Poulenc.

Artistic and practical considerations guide his choice of programs for touring, he said. First he works on choosing works according to who dances them, so all company members perform every night. Next he looks at whether the musical selections complement each other. And he must be able to arrange the program so that time-consuming costume changes come at intermissions, he said.

The frequent company tours, such as this month-long excursion through the Western states, make up only a part of Morris' constant travel. He said his many trips away from the hustle of Manhattan, where he bases his company, include as many stays at his Seattle home as he can manage. During the past year he spent a few days in August visiting former Lar Lubovitch company colleague Nora Reynolds in Albuquerque and Christmas in Santa Fe with cousin Claire Munzenrider, who restores art in the museum complex there.

Much as Morris loves his home town, he thinks his work would lose

vitality if he were to move his headquarters away from the hub of the American dance world, he said. He believes dancers need to be where they can take demanding classes, see other excellent dance, and spend time talking with their peers.

"If you're the only dance company in town, you don't have people around who are like you," he said. "In New York there are lots of people who are like us. That's an important thing. If it's ghettoization, that's just fine. I think it's specialization, really."

But beginning next year Morris and his company will take up residence in Belgium, which will give them more access to dancers throughout Europe, Morris said. When Maurice Béjart moves his internationally known Ballet of the 20th Century to Switzerland, Morris' troupe will assume the performing responsibilities the Béjart company fulfilled in three Brussels theaters.

"We'll still do shows elsewhere," Morris said. "It's a great situation. Everyone's paid decently, because in Europe art is a necessity instead of a luxury ... We'll have live music (for performances) and we'll be paid year-round."

So, Morris said, the extra travel time and increased work load the success demands of him pays off in opportunities to enlarge the scope of his work. "It all just fits perfectly," he said.