

One-night Stand

Mark Morris Dance Group
Northrop Aud., 8 p.m.
Wed. (3/9)

Choreographer Mark Morris has few preconceived notions about his Minnesota debut. He's a little surprised that his Mark Morris Dance Group is only performing one show ("But I forget it's in that huge, huge place."), and that he's receiving so much attention for what amounts to a midweek one-night-stand. But mostly, he's confused as to why he hasn't been invited to perform here before.

"We've been out and around for some time now," Morris says from his New York City apartment. "I really thought the Walker would've picked us up or something."

Whatever the case, he'll be dancing in front of friends, among them New Dance Ensemble's Linda Shapiro, whom he's familiar with through work on national dance panels, and Jonathan Frey and Donald La Course of Minneapolis' Ethnic Dance Theatre, whom he met when he joined his first dance troupe — the Koleda Balkan Ensemble — at age 14. "They are very good guys, it was a great group. We all danced and sang wild stuff for Serbo-Croatians," Morris says between watching "Jeopardy" and packing his bags for bigger travels and his company's move to Brussels, Belgium.

There they'll become the resident dance company of the prestigious Theatre Royal de la Monnaie. He's replacing Maurice Bejart's Ballet of the Twentieth Century, which left after a dispute with the theatre's director last year. Morris is ambivalent about the changeover. "It's like a legacy or something. People think I'm so wild, making these alleged porno-ballets. My God, man, Bejart wrote the book. I wanted to go study with him at the Mudra (his school in Brussels), but even I thought better."

In making the change, moving to Brussels, Morris enters into a three-year contract that will provide him with an annual budget of over \$1.5 million, tripling his usual operating cash flow. The company will have use of eight state-of-the-art dance studios, each with

their own video capabilities, and the opportunity to tour extensively in France, Great Britain and the U.S.

"Obviously, it's the ultimate," Morris says. "I mean, it just don't get any better. It's a very old, ornate, very velvet place, but intimate — only seating about a thousand. I'll be spoiled rotten in three years and then who knows? That's a long time, and all these surprising things keep happening."

For all his new responsibility, he'll maintain a certain freedom. "I'll probably be home as much as I am now," he says of his native Seattle, where he still likes to create his work when he's not setting new dances on groups like the Joffrey and Boston Ballets, Israel's Batsheva Dance Company or choreographing an opera — "Nixon in China" — for avant garde director John Adams. He's finishing up some work there now — between dates on this tour — choreographing "Orpheus and Eurydice" for the Seattle Opera and directing that company's May performance of "Die Fledermaus."

"I love going back there," he says. "My family is there, that's where I still feel my best support. I learned so much at home." Sentimental words from the 30-year-old wunderkind who's been touted by the modern dance world as "the next Balanchine."

"That sounds so serious," Morris says. "I am probably the most overrated choreographer out there today. I mean, I'm a trained flamenco dancer. Don't get me wrong — I love this stuff. But what I'm doing is just, just . . . just fun. But better. You know?"

— Amy Lamphere



Morris has them waiting in the wings.

DANCE