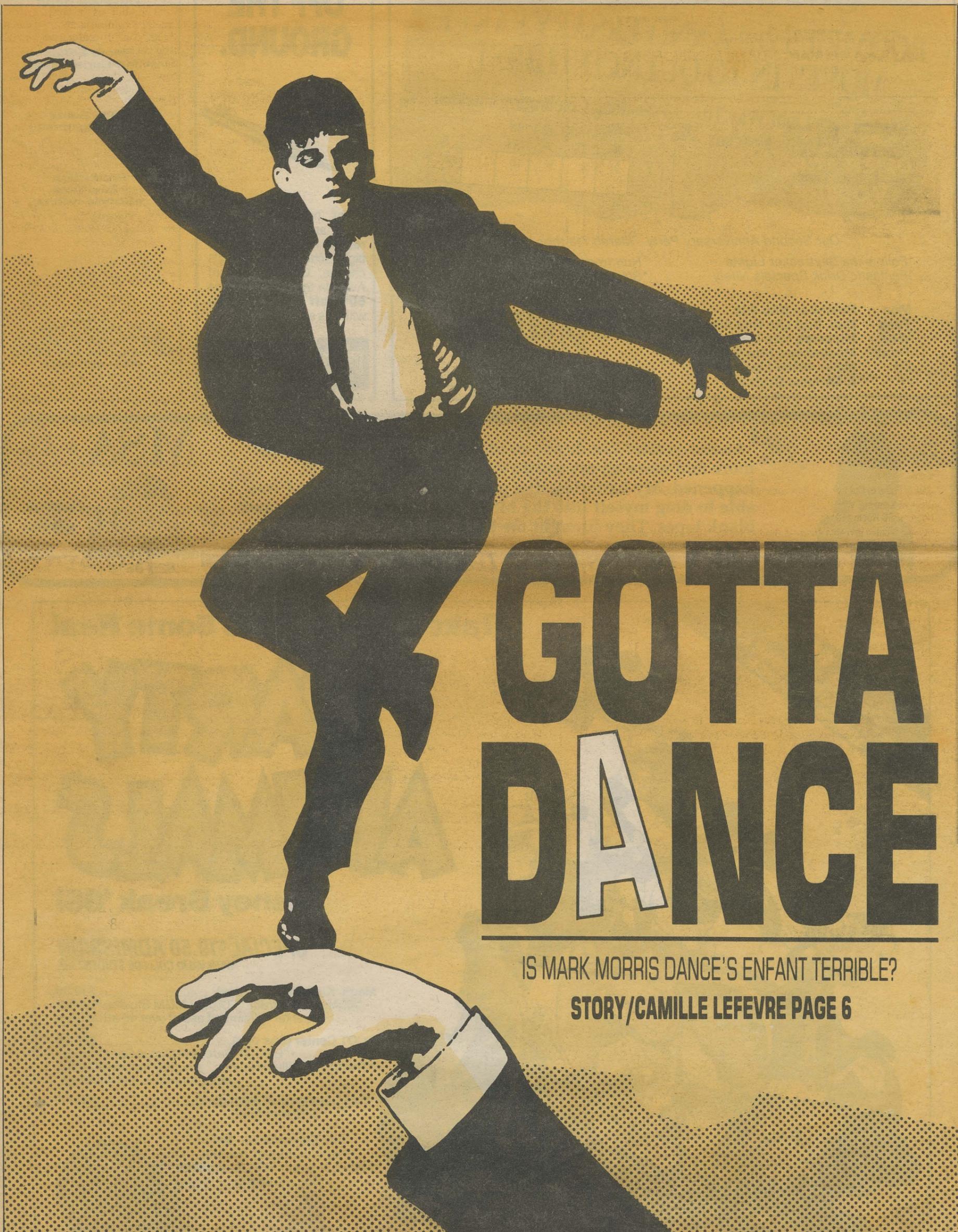


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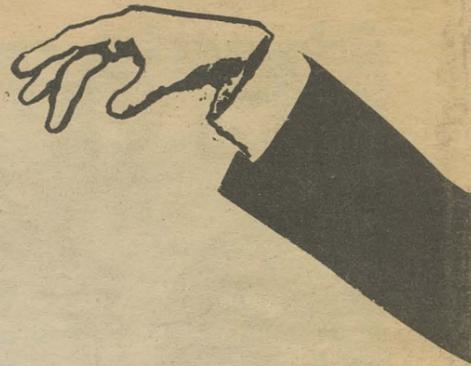
GOTTA DANCE

IS MARK MORRIS DANCE'S ENFANT TERRIBLE?

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JIM MEYER COMES NOT TO PRAISE HUSKER DU, BUT TO BURY THEM PG. 11

GOTTA DANCE



Editors' Note: The Mark Morris Dance Company performs Wednesday at 8 p.m. in Northrop Auditorium.

by Camille Lefevre
After Wednesday night, Twin Cities modern dance aficionados may never be the same. Mark Morris, the most eclectic and sought-after choreographer currently lighting up the dance firmament, is coming to

Rice's novel *Interview with a Vampire* have inspired some of Morris' more theatrical and entertaining works.

The critics have hailed him as the next Balanchine. The popular press laps up his flamboyant style, blunt candor, and disarming sense of humor. PR people love his flashy reputation as the dance world's *enfant terrible*. So who is this guy, anyway?

Barry Alterman, Morris' long-time friend and company manager says basically Morris is an

say 'Oh, it's like a Limon thing,' or, 'I see, it's like a post-modernist thing,' or, 'Oh, it's like Balanchine.' People are always grasping for signposts to hang it on. It's all those things and an amalgam of everything he's ever been exposed to. If you want to point to specifics, Morris dances to music."

Mark Morris has always danced to music. As a youngster growing up in Seattle, he wrapped himself up in sheets and moved to Saint-Saens' *Danse Macabre* or leapt

in New York and within two weeks was snapped up by the Eliot Feld Ballet.

Like a dance nomad searching for the right moves, Morris moved through the companies of Lar Lubovitch, Hannah Kahn, Twyla Tharp, and Laura Dean, until he formed his own dance troupe in 1980. Four years later, after performing a 20-minute solo at Brooklyn Academy of Music—in which he danced to Indian music clad in a loincloth with hands and feet painted crimson—

the future." Croce's blessing gave Morris' work just the credibility and affirmation it needed to receive serious attention.

Praise for Morris' work often begins with his intense musicality. Morris listens to everything—Hindu ragas, country, punk, rock, and classical, with a special affinity for baroque—and his dances are musical visualizations of a particular work. Such an interpretation of rhythm, expression, phrasing, and melody the world hasn't seen since Balanchine, hence the comparison. In an 1985 interview in *Esquire*, Morris described his approach to "Marble Halls," with music by J.S. Bach:

"I think very few choreographers can hear music. There are these vague emotive responses to it, like baroque: happy; Bach: you dance happy. That's a joke. I'm just trying to do what Bach did. He takes a very small amount of material and goes crazy with it, rips it apart and sews it back together. I really figure it was already choreographed. All I did was excavate the dance, and assign movements to the musical themes."

Hence, Morris is a choreographer of many voices, channeled, if you will, by musical inspiration. Add to this sensibility Morris' open homosexuality, self-confidence, acute awareness of world events and popular culture, a rich and eclectic movement background, and you've got the prolific and maverick talent the world is clamoring for.

In addition to his company's repertory of over 50 works, Morris just finished choreographing John Adams' opera "Nixon in China," the Seattle Opera's "Salome" and is working on the Opera's new production of Gluck's "Orpheus and Eurydice." To top it off, Morris was recently offered the greatest gift a dance troupe can receive: his troupe will replace Maurice Bejart's Ballet of the Twentieth Century as the resident company of Brussels' Theatre Royal de la Monnaie, which comes equipped with theatre, studio, steady income, and live music.

But what of his reputation as an *enfant terrible*? Could it be Morris' ability to get away with dancing nude in Boston, to critical acclaim nonetheless? Or creating dances

"He's achieved some level of success by not doing everything you're supposed to do. He's done exactly the opposite."

town. Morris' ability to conjure up fresh choreography for all of his dances makes each work an original. He roams freely through a spectrum of material ranging from loneliness, joy, and obsession to adolescent rituals and child abuse. Roland Barthes' "Mythologies" on championship wrestling, striptease, and detergent, and Anne

honest guy, doing lots of good, solid work, that some people find awe-inspiring and others vehemently hate.

"If you want to pigeonhole him, which is not a good idea, he's a romantic filtered through a modernist sensibility... his work is kind of ineffable and it has to be seen, experienced. It's not something you can harken back to and

over furniture to the 1912 *Overture*. When he was nine, his mother took him to a performance by the legendary flamenco pair Jose Greco and Nina Lorca and his fate was sealed. He studied flamenco and ballet and joined a local Balkan folk-dance troupe. After backpacking through Europe and studying flamenco in Spain, Morris landed

people in the audience wept and the word "genius" bubbled forth from critics' lips. Arlene Croce's 1986 assessment of Morris in *The New Yorker* is now an oft-quoted one: "He's the clearest illustration we have, at the moment, of the principle of succession and how it works in dance: each new master assimilates the past in all its variety and becomes our guide to



Mark Morris Dance Group's *Marble Halls*

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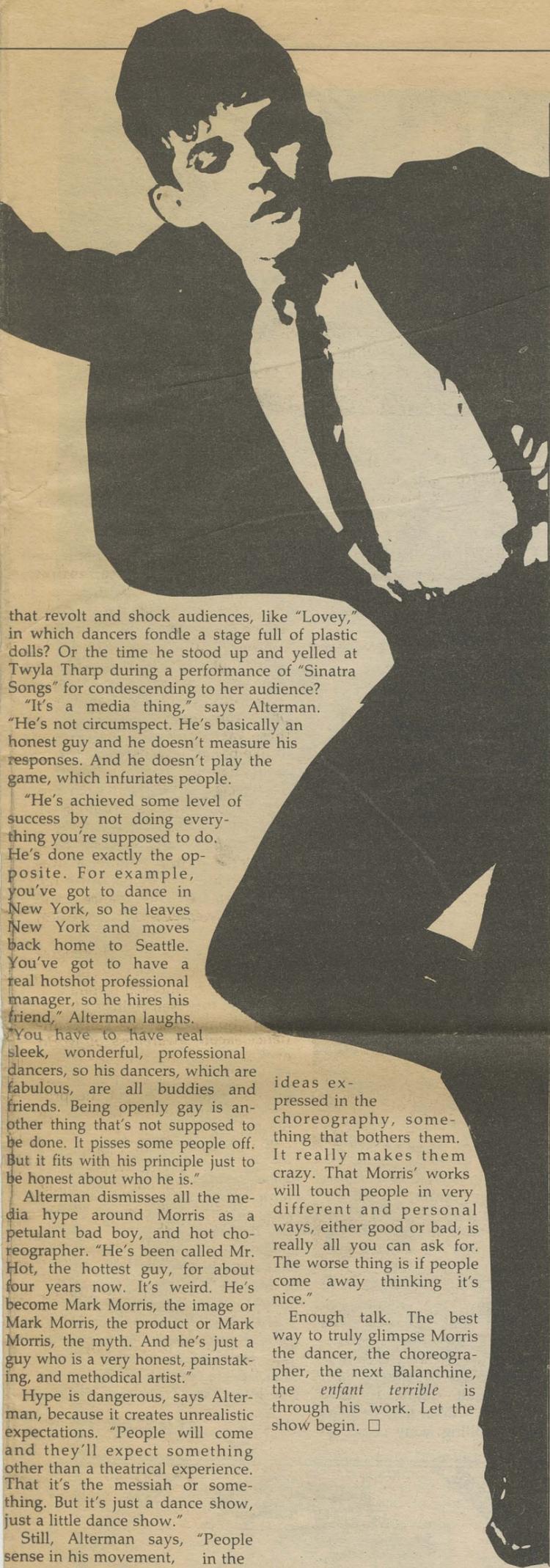
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High Performance

Northrop and Walker discover the joys of working together

by Camille LeFevre

The Mark Morris Dance Company's performance next Wednesday will mark the last of four presentations composing the Discover Series. The brainchild of two local programmers, Dale Schatzlein of Northrop Dance Series and Robert Stearns from Walker Art Center, the Discover series has brought some of the most innovative and unconventional performance art in the world to local stages.

Schatzlein and Stearns had numerous conversations about collaborating on a project which could merge audiences, marketing strategies and expertise to their mutual benefit. "Northrop has a larger hall, like an opera house, a certain built-in audience for dance, and a number of marketing edges that Walker doesn't have," says Schatzlein. "Walker has a history of presenting the avant garde but in smaller, experimental places."

"Northrop was interested in more adventurous programming, but needed to take the first steps," adds Stearns, "and the programming was a means to that end." But Schatzlein and Stearns also wanted to show audiences that much new performance art is being produced on the proscenium stage, instead of in lofts.

The series premiered last fall with the Japanese *butoh* group Sankai Juku, moved on to Philip Glass' live musical accompaniment to the film *Koyaanisqatsi*, and Martha Clarke's rendition of Hieronymus Bosch's painting *Garden of Earthly Delights*, and concludes with Mark Morris' original dance works. As a joint effort between the Twin Cities' foremost promoters of new dance work, it's not surprising that three out of the four performances were movement-based. Actually, Morris and Sankai Juku were already slated for Northrop's 1987-88 series when they were incorporated into the Discover Series. But using the two dance groups hardly restricted the intended scope of Discover: to challenge our definitions of

dance, theatre, film, and music in performance.

One of the governing criteria in selecting the program, says Schatzlein, was that the artists' work cross and expand the thresholds of a given medium. Glass' presentation of *Koyaanisqatsi* transformed a film and musical event into theater. The live accompaniment coursing beneath the film's desert panoramas and blurred cityscapes—magnified through projection on a huge screen in Northrop Auditorium—heightened the performance's aural and visual intensity, bringing both to a dramatic, operatic pitch.

Dance theater—a variable combination of movement, emotion, story-telling, and staging—is a rubric the Discover Series' other three performances could be placed under.

Clad largely in a coating of rice-powder, Sankai Juku presented *Jomon Sho (Homage to Prehistory)*, a ritual in seven episodes inspired by primitive cave paintings. Only the vaguest outline of a narrative was present: music provided the landscape, large brass rings worked as symbolic characters, and the choreography was a concentration of stillness and gesture rather than motion through space.

Dancer and choreographer Martha Clarke startled audiences with her bold interpretation of Bosch's triptych *Garden of Earthly Delights*. In the space of one hour, Clarke captured the phantasmagorical imagery, complexity, and mood of the triptych's panels in a theater of humor and terror. Flying dancers soared over our heads with delight and menace, and Renaissance instruments became musical tools of torture, as the dancers and musicians recreated the triptych's innocence, carnality, and hell.

Theatricality was another key concept in the development of the Discover Series. "Dance and music artists are finding great interest in theatricality. That sort of spectacle is at the base of what's going on in the contemporary performing arts at this scale," says Stearns. "Theater is at the base of the whole Discover Series, a certain kind of visual staging: all the works have that, including *Koyaanisqatsi*. And the considerable scale of some of that work is one reason for the collaboration between Walker and Northrop."

As Morris wraps up year No. 1 of the new Discover Series, year No. 2 is already in the works. Stearns and Schatzlein promise more theatricality, kinetic movement, and vision from artists currently reshaping the boundaries of their mediums. The who, what, and where are secrets yet to be revealed. We'll wait with expectation. □



Illustration/Janie Elias

that revolt and shock audiences, like "Lovey," in which dancers fondle a stage full of plastic dolls? Or the time he stood up and yelled at Twyla Tharp during a performance of "Sinatra Songs" for condescending to her audience?

"It's a media thing," says Alterman. "He's not circumspect. He's basically an honest guy and he doesn't measure his responses. And he doesn't play the game, which infuriates people."

"He's achieved some level of success by not doing everything you're supposed to do. He's done exactly the opposite. For example, you've got to dance in New York, so he leaves New York and moves back home to Seattle. You've got to have a real hotshot professional manager, so he hires his friend," Alterman laughs.

"You have to have real sleek, wonderful, professional dancers, so his dancers, which are fabulous, are all buddies and friends. Being openly gay is another thing that's not supposed to be done. It pisses some people off. But it fits with his principle just to be honest about who he is."

Alterman dismisses all the media hype around Morris as a petulant bad boy, and hot choreographer. "He's been called Mr. Hot, the hottest guy, for about four years now. It's weird. He's become Mark Morris, the image or Mark Morris, the product or Mark Morris, the myth. And he's just a guy who is a very honest, painstaking, and methodical artist."

Hype is dangerous, says Alterman, because it creates unrealistic expectations. "People will come and they'll expect something other than a theatrical experience. That it's the messiah or something. But it's just a dance show, just a little dance show."

Still, Alterman says, "People sense in his movement, in the

ideas expressed in the choreography, something that bothers them. It really makes them crazy. That Morris' works will touch people in very different and personal ways, either good or bad, is really all you can ask for. The worse thing is if people come away thinking it's nice."

Enough talk. The best way to truly glimpse Morris the dancer, the choreographer, the next Balanchine, the *enfant terrible* is through his work. Let the show begin. □

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