

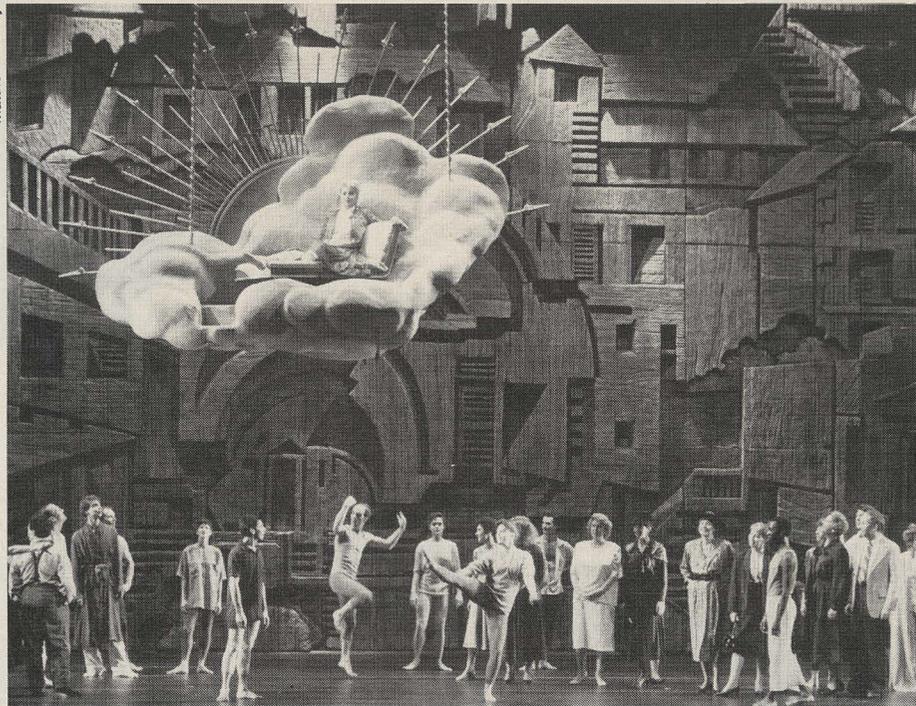
Seattle—The Seattle Opera's new *Orpheus and Eurydice* (January 16-27), directed by Stephen Wadsworth with sets by Thomas Lynch and choreography by Mark Morris, is one of those up-to-date productions where Orpheus and Eurydice have a nice apartment with Danish modern furniture, and Orpheus goes down to the underworld in a Burberry raincoat. At the same time it is, in the postmodern way, a historically learned production, with Cupid descending from the flies on a magnificent cloud machine just such as might have flown him to the stage in Gluck's original, 1774 production: fluffy cumuli supporting a white silk chaise on which the love god reclines serenely.

The dances, likewise, are a fusion of contemporary and historicist. On the one hand, here are twelve hip-looking young people—it is Morris's own company—dressed in bright-colored jerseys, and charging around with an unmistakably contemporary plasticity: blunt, frank, colloquial. On the other hand, what they are performing most of the time are dances of the utmost formality—a gavotte, a chaconne, a minuet—full of fine manners and old-world glamour. In the chaconne, they move in a rose pattern that you can find recorded in Fabritio Caroso's *Nobiltà di Dame*, 1605.

So what Morris has done here, as in the majority of his work since 1980, is to yoke a Judson way of moving to materials that Judson specifically anathematized. ("NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe. . .") Does it work? Yes, almost all the time. There are moments when the thing starts to show its seams—for example, in Morris's own "Orpheus' Spirit" solo, which, looking as it does like John Belushi-plays-Isadora, confuses you emotionally at a solemn moment (Orpheus's entry into the underworld), and does not have enough sheer dance-sense—sense as steps and rhythm—to make good that violation. But I think that most of Morris's modernizations of the old-fashioned and the high-styled have the effect of giving back to us the beauty and profundity of those things. His rough humor sands them; they shine again.

I have in my mind that rose-patterned chaconne. In and out the dancers braid their lines, making the petals. Now and then they break into little groups—four groups of three, three groups of four—with all the nice, picky elegance that this kind of subdividing communicates. Meanwhile, they reiterate steps from earlier in the opera, with all the classical orderliness that that kind of restatement communicates. Yet at the same time that they are making this elegant classical

Matthew McVay



Contemporary and historicist: Mark Morris set the choreography for the Seattle Opera's *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Here, members of the Mark Morris Dance Group and the Seattle Opera Chorus against Thomas Lynch's setting.

dance they are folding into it other, lumpier elements: sudden spins and fast dives, violent little back-kicks, a recurring routine where they fly out from the center, turn, and then do three hard, bent-over little hops, like something out of a folk dance, before reclosing the circle. And rhythmically it is all one story, the hard and the soft, the blunt and the fussy, giving, each to the other, shapeliness and contrast.

So Morris's method is dialectical. By step and counterstep, he arrives finally at refinement without affectation, emotion without sentimentality. He is a believer, but without that little note of falseness—the blues more blue, the trumpets more heavenly—that almost invariably goes with belief.

Joan Acocella

Washington, DC—Everyone agreed that the **Royal Spanish National Ballet** was remarkable in Spanish dance, but some found it not likable. Just one program was given during the company's week at Kennedy Center's Opera House (December 9-13), with the first half of the bill an assortment of numbers based on Spain's traditions, and the second half a dance drama built of diverse materials. It was the first, supposedly more conventional part that turned out to be controversial.

José Antonio, the RSNB's director and star, has tried to abstract the highly individual art of flamenco and related

forms of dance. He wants to systematize Spanish-ethnic, "like ballet." Company training includes ballet classes. In Spanish material, the dancers' attack and phrasing are unusually uniform. One result is great energy and evenness in the percussive footwork; not only is the tapping or stamping impact of right and left foot balanced, but a given power level can be sustained seemingly forever by the entire corps. There are, too, less advantageous consequences. Balletic stretch and placement act as barricades impeding the explosiveness of Spanish dancing.

Rather than creating a company style from a single impetus, Antonio has regimented his dancers' behavior and reined in their expressivity. In the group numbers—Alberto Lorca's *Ritmos*, Martin Vargas's *Caracoles*, and Juan Quintero's *Bulerias*—the virtues of evenness and energy are amassed to their detriment. The company becomes an army on the move, and the effect is ominous.

Perhaps Antonio has made the RSNB in his own image. He is a performer of virtuoso caliber but cold temperament. His guest artist, Merche Esmeralda, is a stranger to this aesthetic. For all her discipline, Esmeralda's *Solea* in the flamenco suite was proud, passionate, and full of spontaneity. She was especially supple in the upper body.

As a dance actress, Esmeralda made the second part of the program viable. She was Medea in a version of the