

Mark Morris Dance Group at BAM

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP. "New Love Song Waltzes," "Fugue and Fantasy," "Sonata for Clarinet and Piano," "One Charming Night," "Strict Songs," all choreographed by Mark Morris. With the Orchestra of St. Luke's, Michael Feldman, conductor, and the New York City Gay Men's Chorus, Gary Miller, music director. Tuesday night at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Through Sunday.

IT WAS AN EVENING filled with generosity and openness, to say nothing of wit, imagination, skill and craft. To watch Mark Morris and his company was to take deep draughts of fresh air. Morris' troupe, which opened Tuesday night at the Brooklyn Academy of Music after a two-year absence, offered the most satisfying dance — of any stripe — of the season. Put simply, it was a wow of a show.

from ballet to folkdancing, is in his choreography. So is his sense of humor. But it's all part of a smooth, intensely musical entity.

There are no seams, no sense of contrivance, only pleasant shocks of recognition that here is a folk-

A black and white photograph capturing a dynamic moment in a theatrical performance. In the center, a male dancer wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt and light-colored, loose-fitting trousers is lifting a female dancer. The female dancer, dressed in a light-colored, flowing, sleeveless dress, is suspended in the air, her body arched backwards with one arm extended upwards. To the left, another dancer is crouched low to the ground, looking up towards the lifted dancer. In the foreground on the right, the back and legs of a fourth dancer are visible, also crouching. The background is a dark, textured wall, and the floor appears to be a dark stage surface. The overall mood is dramatic and expressive.

Members of the Mark Morris Dance Group during rehearsal

Newsday / J. Conrad Williams Jr.

gleefully dusting off their hands.
His dozen dancers, as a whole,

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ment mostly to in-kind services and had been able to keep the box-office receipts from the play's tryout in Stratford-Upon-Avon, it did not share the loss.

The experience with "Carrie" has also not deterred the company's intention to produce more musicals for Broadway. In February, when the RSC actors are on hiatus, the company has for the last several years produced a musical in the hope of raising cash. It was to receive a 10 percent share of "Carrie."

Although there are no firm decisions on the musical for next year, speculation is the company will perform its adaptation of "The Wizard of Oz."

"Oz," a staging of the MGM classic, was first created as a Christmas show for children. London critics were generally kind to the piece when it opened last holiday season. It sold out its inaugural run.

However, the piece is less substantial than either "Les Miserables" or "Kiss Me Kate," and is far less ambitious than "Carrie."

As for RSC artistic director Terry Hands, who as director and lighting designer of "Carrie" had suffered a personal blow from the show's failure, he has already begun rehearsals for RSC's "Julius Caesar," set for a June 14 opening. ■

Mark Morris Dance Troupe at BAM

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aren't as slender as other dancers; neither is Morris. They're well-muscled, verging on stocky, but they're fast and unified, particularly in the Sonata. Set to Poulenc's Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, it's a wonderful mixture of lyricism and funny business for 11 dancers. They're all in red tights and black tops, except for Morris, whose tights are chartreuse.

As the piece begins, he's the central figure in a cluster of dancers (men and women; his roles are rarely sex-bound). He strikes a pose, and they suddenly and matter-of-factly carry him into the wings. So much for the grandeur of leadership. The others form a double line across the stage and fill it with brushing kicks; it becomes an alley when Morris reappears with Tina Fehlandt, and they zoom down its center, arms outstretched in chain turns. She strikes a recumbent pose, and he again vanishes, leaving her there in an hilarious empty luxuriance.

The central section blends funniness and a kind of mellow poesy; the lights are dim, and the dancers, again in that double line, pair off so that each couple looks like one person with four hands. Hands that, in Morris's hands, become twice as poetic as two.

After one dancer disposes of Morris by simply knocking him down, the dancers unite to frolic for the third movement, almost like the Munchkins in "The Wizard of Oz."

In a more serious vein there was the new "Strict Songs," with music by Lou Harrison based on Hopi Indian chants, beautifully sung by the New York City Gay Men's Chorus and dedicated to the memory of Liberate.

Here as in the Sonata, the work's power derives

in part from the repetition of dance phrases and poses. Hands curved above the head in a prayer-like pose in one section of the piece are later mirrored as the dancers lie on the floor and form the same cupped shape with their entire bodies. But now it becomes a more earth-encompassing figure. The dancers wear green and brown bathing suits, the women's with blue tops, vaguely suggesting earth, nature and sky. Some of the figures they make as they move are so simple, yet so powerful: Five pairs of dancers hold on to each other and swing in a circle, and imperceptibly, the circle of circlers draws together, then breaks into a stunning canon of taxing one-legged poses.

"Fugue and Fantasy," a wonderful new piece united only by the fact that both sections were written by Mozart, tackles two challenges and wins. The first was to do a dance with chairs. That's the Fugue, for a quartet of dancers and a quartet of chairs. What goes on almost defies description; its split-second timing is all.

It's a fugal outpouring of somersaults, hand gestures, funny waggly feet, standing, sitting, kicking, rising, turning that finally proves so unnerving that one of the dancers, a wild look in his eyes, tries to run away.

The Fantasy's challenge seems to have been to move five dancers from upstage right to downstage left in the most interesting way possible; Morris did it by inventing a Big Scary Thing in the Corner, and the dancers' progress as they inch toward it, then back away from it, grabbing their throats in terror, is of unflagging fascination.

Superb performances of the rib-tickling yet lyrical "New Love Song Waltzes" and the uproarious love duo "One Charming Night" (by Morris and Teri Weksler) completed the evening. / ■■

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