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Reviews/Dance

Emphasis on Live Music

By Mark Morris Troupe

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

Mark Morris is not a great choreographer but he is a fluent and entertaining one. His work, in its joining of energy and classical music, belongs to the same corner as Paul Taylor's and Lar Lubovitch's. As Tuesday night's opening by the Mark Morris Dance Company proved again at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (30 Lafayette Avenue, at Ashland Place), he is still finding his way — to the great enjoyment of the audience.

The program, which runs through Sunday afternoon, features three New York premieres by Mr. Morris: "Sonata for Clarinet and Piano," set to Poulenc; "Fugue and Fantasy," to Mozart's music, and "Strict Songs," to a mesmerizing score by Lou Harrison based on Hopi Indian chants and sung in a celebratory, haunting tone by the New York City Gay Men's Chorus. The piece, dedicated to Libera, was accompanied by the Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted throughout the evening by Michael Feldman.

This important emphasis on live singers and musicians was seen also

One work is performed to a score based on Hopi chants.

in the program's remaining works, Brahms's "New Love Song Waltzes" and Purcell's "One Charming Night."

Mr. Morris is commonly singled out as a highly musical choreographer, but this quality would seem to pinpoint his skill at analyzing a score's structure and playing with its visual equivalent onstage rather than with adding a new and equal dimension to that score.

"New Love Song Waltzes" is a good introduction to his approach, which works against musical associations to the point of incongruity. The music becomes a foundation for kinetic punchlines. The audience laughs because the image onstage deflates just as the music tends to inflate.

Some of the same Brahms songs (sung here by Lorraine Hunt, Marcia Hunt, Jeffrey Thomas and Joseph McKee, with Robert Wolinsky and David Oei as pianists) are used in Balanchine's "Liebeslieder Walzer." But the romantic courtships of that ballet are replaced here by an athletic communal spirit.

The distinctiveness of Mr. Morris's dancers lies in a barelegged earthiness, symbolized in this piece by Ruth

Davidson's opening cartwheeling solo, which ushers in the ensemble. The fluid patterns are clear and large, flowing into entangled circles. Relationships are implied with studied naturalness and studded with movement jokes. There is a lot of running, cleverly varied in its rhythm. Acceleration is always good for a laugh.

No matter how seriously he wants to be taken, Mr. Morris cannot resist the campy punchline to the emphatic musical beat. Mozart's fugue in "Fugue and Fantasy" takes this attitude to an extreme. It is an outright parody of the experimental Belgian choreographer, Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, who uses chairs and repetition.

Four dancers get up and sit down repeating a set of gestures; the piece is, in fact, fugal in its structure. Brilliant in their speed and execution, the dancers were Tina Fehlandt, David Landis, Kraig Patterson and Teri Weksler, always challenging the viewer to keep up with who was doing what in relation to whom.

The second section, to Mozart's Fantasia in C minor, had Ruth Davidson, Susan Hadley, Jon Mensinger, Donald Mouton and Keith Sabado, looking like Dead End Kids in short trousers and plaid shirts making irregular progress across the stage. Their trek was interrupted by eruptions of independent dancing, fearful looks into the wings and deliberate awkwardness. All too often, the big movements were executed directly on the musical accent.

Mr. Morris is more successful when he channels the movement, even obliquely, into characterization as in "One Charming Night." From the moment he comes out in a business suit and red makeup on his eyelids and courts Miss Weksler, who wears a cross over her peasant dress, we know we are in vampire land. The big bite finally comes and when Miss Weksler flies off on her new chum's nape while Drew Minter sings "Alleluia," a sense of absurdist poetry hangs in the air. As a dancer, Mr. Morris is a special virtuoso, seen to superb effect in a wonderfully disjointed solo.

In "Strict Songs," Mr. Morris takes a step forward. When Miss Davidson, Miss Fehlandt, Miss Hadley, Penny Hutchinson, Mr. Landis, Mr. Mensinger, Mr. Mouton, Mr. Patterson, Mr. Sabado and Pier Voulkos spring out in aqua and dark bathing suits, the choreography suggests a polyphonic ode to nature by a nature colony. The sculptural bodies, with their rounded sense of volume, seem released into Mr. Morris's special blend of weighted gesture and light landings. Miss Fehlandt has an egg-shaped curved solo; the dancers dive into the wings. Something sings in this best of Mr. Morris's pieces.