

# Mark Norris Dance Group far-reaching

*MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP at the Boston Opera House Friday and last night only.*

By DEBBIE FORMAN  
FEATURES EDITOR

BOSTON — Mark Morris' choreography has a driving edge. It is abstractly expressionistic, often indecipherable, yet powerful.

His company of dancers has an earthy quality. No delicate, svelte body types here. They are vigorous dancers, whose dancing is unencumbered by the gloss and refinement that we have come to expect even from modern dance companies.

On a two-day visit to Boston this weekend before the 32-year-old Morris goes off to take up residence as director of dance at the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, Belgium, his company presented a volatile program to an adoring audience.

Morris, the new darling of modern dance, obviously has a devoted following in the Hub, where the Dance

## REVIEW

Umbrella first presented him three years ago before he had achieved the eminent position he now holds. In appreciation for the Dance Umbrella's support, Morris presented this program as a benefit for the producing organization.

The largest, most far-reaching of his weekend program was 'Gloria,' danced to the magnificent music, 'Gloria in D,' by Antonio Vivaldi. The dance has several motifs that are invoked again and again throughout. One motif is a slithering effect where dancers lie on their stomachs on the stage and inch forward like giant snakes.

In one of the beginning movements, one dancer stands above a sea of bodies. Above the rhythmic movements on the floor — like ocean waves — first one dancer, then another and another take turns twisting and arching, forming angular shapes.

Dancers leap across the stage, jump and click their barefooted heels in mid-air. The movements in 'Gloria' vary from free-wheeling, swinging arms to hardened, deliberate steps.

The dance is a free-form association of smooth, sleek lines (lyrical skating steps and leaps) and hard, jerky — sometimes almost spastic — movements.

Morris uses his various motifs like long notes which he holds and repeats until they create indelible images. He is a master of contrast, and his changes are abrupt or simultaneous.

He balances a segment of leaping dancers with a sequence with a group pursuing the belly crawl. One lithe dancer leaps ethereally across the stage, then gets stuck at the edge rotating her arms as if she is trying to take flight again but cannot. The moods change, but 'Gloria' maintains an underlying religiosity in keeping with the tone of the Vivaldi music.

Well-known for his musicality, Morris can take a piece of Mozart or Handel or Vivaldi and combine it with the post-modern dance expressions in a remarkable way. In "Fugue and Fantasy," Morris uses Mozart's music to express a childlike image of whimsical rough-housing and mysterious awe. Five dancers stand in a row at the left of the stage facing on the diagonal to the right. They keep this arrangement throughout as they move in a group further and further toward the right, always looking at some invisible force that alternately draws and repels them.

One dancer jumps on another's back, then falls off. They pull and tug at one another. They all hold hands and move in unison in smooth steps, then they break apart and one leaps into the arms of three others. They

grasp and cling, always drawn by that ominous force at the right.

"Strict Songs," the opening number, danced to the music of Lou Harrison, was the least successful Friday night. The dancers appeared slightly off as if they had not warmed up adequately. The dance has primitive, ritualistic associations.

It is a combination of a series of leaps across the stage — which present a broad sweep of movement — and small, concise stretchings and turnings — which contain the expressions in tight, abstract shapes.

"Deck of Cards" is a funny little dance that opens with a toy truck meandering around the stage to the anecdotal tale of a country-western song. Then Morris, wearing a dress, with his long hair wild, dances a dramatic parody of a woman in an erratic frenzy.

The second part has Donald Mouton wearing an Army uniform sans trousers, miming a song by T. Texas Tyler about the similarities of a deck of cards and the religious references of the Bible. It is a goofy dance that sparked the audience with laughter.

Morris is soon off to Brussels for a comfortable position in state-supported luxury, which had been occupied for almost 30 years by Maurice Bejart and company, who left abruptly for Switzerland last spring.

This weekend, Boston audiences wished Morris a rousing bon voyage.