

dance

The Cat's Meow

Mark Morris Dance Group at the Boston Opera House, June 3,4.

Mark Morris has risen to the top of the Modern Dance world like rich cream.



Dance Celeb Mark Morris

Finally—a cultural hero who dares to arrive at the banquet of honors wearing a modest orange chiffon dress, a mop of brown curly locks cascading to his shoulders and a carton of cigarettes stashed under his arm. Coined the "Enfant Terrible" of Modern Dance, Morris has slipped through the filters and landed feet first center stage in the lime light of public approval and critical acclaim. This campy outspoken "bad boy" has wriggled his way into the hearts of even the most polite patrons, earning praise, big bucks and a future so bright he better be wearing shades.

Morris is more than a novelty. The Mark Morris Dance Group—founded in 1980, catapulted to superstardom in 1984—has been touring extensively in Europe and the U.S. ever since. In addition to choreographing for his own company, Morris has set work on the Boston Ballet, The Joffrey Ballet, The American Ballet Theatre and the Seattle Opera's productions of *Salome*, *Orpheus* and

Eurydice, and *Die Fledermaus*, to name just a few.

In addition to being an astoundingly prolific artist, the range of Morris' choreographic ventures is diverse and varied, from short conceptual solos set to country western music, to lengthy abstract ensemble sorks set to Vivaldi. There is no way to sum up his style other than to say he is a tasteful blend of Balanchine and Tiny Tim. From the flippant, idiosyncratic, campy waltzes through the tulips, to the studied formalism of a Balanchine Ballet, Morris' choreography is a new language of wit and invention.

Remembering Jeremy

This past weekend's concert at the Opera House featuring four Boston premieres, was a benefit for Dance Umbrella as a tribute to Jeremy Alliger, its Executive Director, who was an early believer in Morris' work and helped to rocket him to stardom in 1984. This was one of the final U.S. stops before the company's relocation to Brussels, Belgium, where Morris will serve as Director of Dance of the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie. With his company in residence, Morris will have access to eight studios, three theatres, scene and costume shops, and a \$1.5 million annual operating budget. Top that.

"Strict Songs" opened the show, the cast of ten galloping on stage with heads bowed forward, clad in brown briefs with green trim and halter tops for the women. A refreshing mixture of shapes, sizes, and colors, this heterogenous ensemble, referred to by some critics as a "motley crew," is certainly not cast in the singular mold that stamps out most of the picture book body types that generally grace the stages in most homogenous troupes. Morris builds on each unique personality and capitalizes on the richness of diversity. There is a strength and enjoyment that permeates the ensemble and reaches the audience. "Strict Songs" is a wash of exuberance, at times animalistic—a tribe of bi-peds that delight in moving amongst themselves. Morris carefully crafts the comings and goings, building and suspending the momentum, from full ensemble to momentary duets. Random pairings and liftings establish each individual on an equal footing, obliterating sexist roles.

In "Deck of Cards," Morris has choreographed a delightful triptych of solos for a remote control toy truck, a swooning country western dame (Morris in orange chiffon drag) and a pantless soldier. Here his campy wit is most blatant but still tasteful by polite standards.

"Fugue and Fantasy" and his epic "Gloria" are larger, abstract works that ex-

emplify Morris' musical intelligence and seminal vocabulary. It is clear that Morris has learned well from his forerunners. His works show all the marks of careful crafting, but he is building the sentences with his own idiosyncratic alphabet. His wit and his humor is steeped in the tradition of camp, but stripped of its usual flamboyant trappings and embedded deeply in the fabric of a more abstract vocabulary. He is not a gay artist struggling to make blatant political statements but a gay artist who allows the sensibilities of his gay heritage to permeate his work. It is lively, impassioned, honest and unaffected, with a witty integrity that is challenging and unapologetic.

—Ed Groff

Bay Windows

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