

WEEKEND

Rochester, N.Y., Thursday Evening, August 4, 1988

BEST BETS

AUGUST 4-7 — MORE ON 3E

4 TONIGHT

□ **FAMILY AFFAIR:** "Family Fun" means pig racing, a rodeo, a demolition derby, live music and of course, a heavy dose of livestock and agricultural shows, at this year's Monroe County Fair. The fun begins at 6:30 p.m. today with a parade from The Marketplace mall to the Fairgrounds in Henrietta. The Fair will be open daily through Aug. 14 from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Admission is \$3, \$1.50 for children 5-12, and free for children under five. For a complete listing of events, see page 20E.

5 FRIDAY

□ **NIGHT MOVES:** "A Midsummer Night's Run" through Cobbs Hill Park could be just the thing to help you through the dog days of August. Proceeds from the 5K race benefit local leukemia research. Pre-registration is \$6 at the Leukemia Society office, 233 Alexander St., and \$8 the day of the race, which begins at 7:30 p.m. For more information call 263-2440.

6 SATURDAY

□ **BY LAND AND BY SEA:** It's a good weekend for browsing. This year's Park Avenue Arts Festival is larger than ever with more visual artists, new craft styles and more entertainment. More than 160 artists and craftspeople are coming from the United States and Canada to participate. The festival is from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, and admission is free. For those with more seafaring tastes, there's the Waterfront Art Festival at Kershaw Park on Lakeshore Drive in Canandaigua. More than 200 exhibitors will show their work Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. The Empire State Ballet Theatre also will be on hand. Admission is \$1; free for children 5 and under.

7 SUNDAY

□ **PUTTIN' ON THE HITS:** Film and theater take center stage when British composer John Dankworth conducts the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra at Finger Lakes Performing Arts Center. The concert, which begins at 7:30 p.m., includes medleys of work by Noel Coward and the Beatles, as well as scores from films such as *Funny Girl* and *The Sandpiper*. Tickets, \$18-\$6, are available at the RPO box office, 14 Gibbs St., the Finger Lakes box office, Lincoln Hill Road, or by calling 222-5000 or 1-394-7190.

MARK MORRIS

is raining sweat. It drips off the tendrils of his bushy, dark brown ponytail. It trickles down his angular face. It slaps the floppy undershirt to his beefy torso like white plaster.

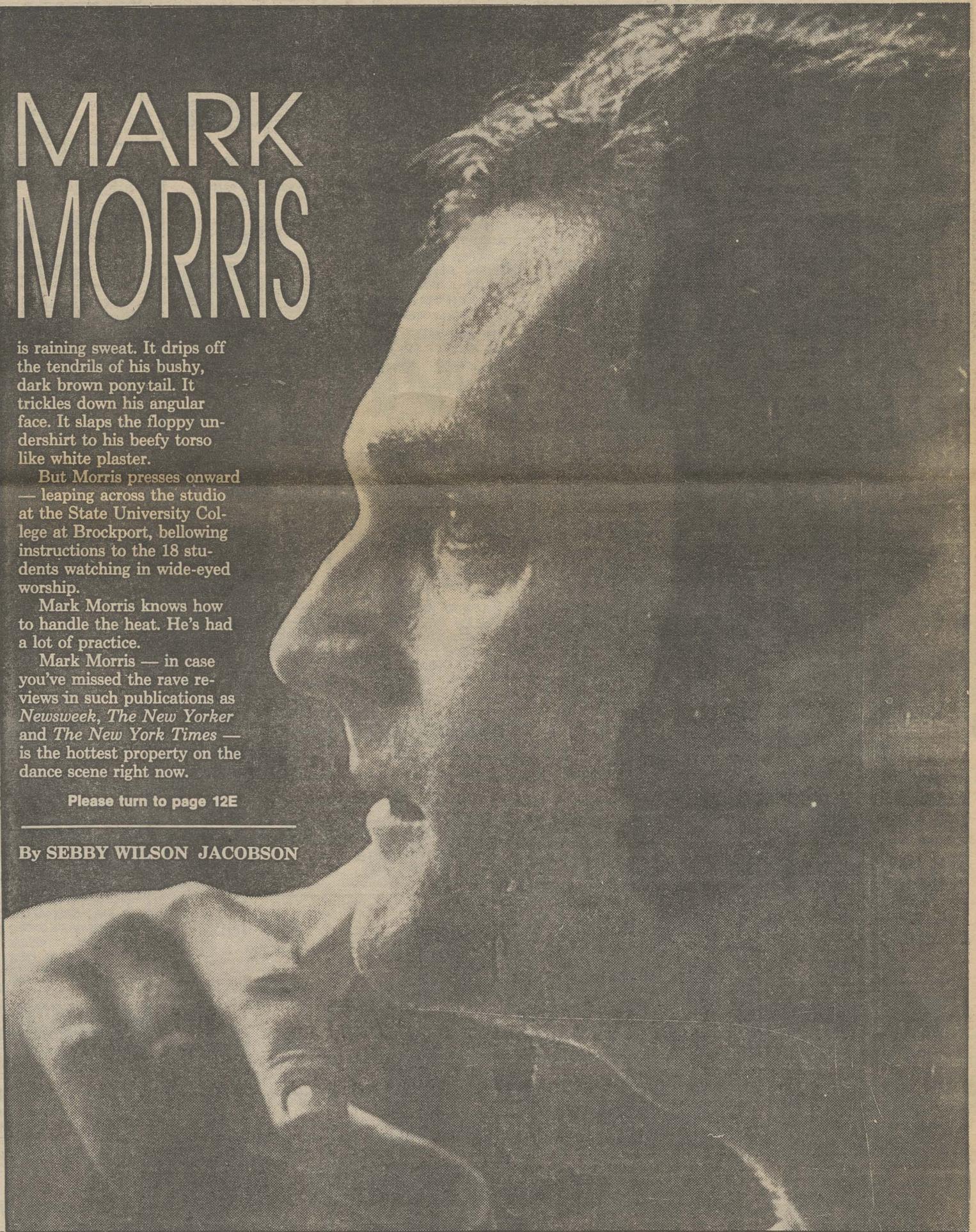
But Morris presses onward — leaping across the studio at the State University College at Brockport, bellowing instructions to the 18 students watching in wide-eyed worship.

Mark Morris knows how to handle the heat. He's had a lot of practice.

Mark Morris — in case you've missed the rave reviews in such publications as *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* — is the hottest property on the dance scene right now.

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By SEBBY WILSON JACOBSON



Karen Mitchell/Times-Union

COVER STORY

MARK MORRIS

From page 1E

How hot?

So hot that Mikhail Baryshnikov recently danced for Morris, not as a star but as just another member of the ensemble, calling him "an outrageous talent."

So hot that dancers from high schools, colleges and professional companies around the country have come to Brockport to study with him for two weeks.

So hot that he won't be around here much longer.

In a few weeks — just before his 32nd birthday on Aug. 29 — the New York City-based choreographer and his 12-member dance troupe will fly to Brussels, Belgium, where Morris has a three-year contract to create a resident dance company.

But before taking off for Europe and arguably the cushiest deal in the dance world today, the Mark Morris Dance Group will present a few more concerts: at Brockport's Hartwell Hall dance gym next Friday; at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center Aug. 15-20. And Friday, students from his workshop will perform excerpts of Morris' work — whose distinctive, musical style ranges from stark elegance, to goofy mockeries of ballet, to an androgynous athleticism in which women are as likely to lift men as vice versa.

So, why has His Royal Hotness deigned to spend two of his last weeks in America in this modest, upstate New York town? Because it just so happens that his company managing director, Nancy Umanoff, and general manager, Barry Alterman, are avid alumnae of SUNY Brockport. Funding from the New York State Council on the Arts made the two-week stint at Brockport "financially feasible," says Alterman, "but we would have come here anyway."

Alterman says he wanted a low-key place in the country, not too far from Saratoga Springs, for Morris and the troupe to relax and work and get their act together before taking it on to Europe. While in Brockport, they've begun working on a two-hour dance set to Handel's *Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* that will premier in Brussels Nov. 23 — and will have a sneak preview at the informal Brockport concert next week.

At home among opposites

But Morris clearly relishes the act of teaching, too, pouring into it all the energy, discipline and campy humor for which his dances are renowned.

One minute, he's playing the role of the rigid, exacting ballet master. The lofty brick walls resound as he booms out the ancient vocabulary of classical ballet: *frappe, arabesque, releve, plie, jete*.

The next minute, he's combining these traditional, graceful movements into quirky combinations set to a complex boogie-woogie beat.

One minute he's barking at the students, taunting them on to greater heights: "Even though you may have been complimented on the pliancy of your back, I want *more*. Fifty times more! *Exactly 50 times more!*"

The next minute, he slouches in a folding chair, gazing at the sweating, panting pack like a proud parent: "Ooooooh! That's so goooood!" he squeals, rolling his big, green eyes and wiggling his tongue.

The man with the aristocratic profile and the Boy George eyes seems quite at home among opposites, and quite used to having his cake and eating it too.

He's just led a non-stop, 90-minute class that had students half his age staggering with exhaustion and applauding with appreciation. And now he sits in a dormitory room like a paragon of bad habits: a bottle of Foster's lager beer in one hand; a clove cigarette in the other. On his lap is a machine-gun-shaped squirt gun, which he got from Wegman's. "I love Wegmans. I go twice a day. They have a good toy section."

And on his face, he wears a Cheshire Cat grin to accompany his shrugging explanation: "Dancers are people too."

Breaking stereotypes

That flip and simple sounding statement actually contains kernels of truth about why Mark Morris has become such a phenomenon.

In an age when most dancers strive for an adolescent, anorexic kind of beauty, those in Morris' company stand out for their maturity. Most are well over 30 years old. Some are tiny, but others are solid and thick-limbed. Some have gray hair or are visibly balding or wear glasses.

But Morris has not chosen his motley crew of dancers in order to make a political statement about the aesthetics of the human body. He has chosen them, he says, "because I like the way everybody dances, and everybody hears music really, really well." Besides, he continues, "What can you possibly do at 18 that has any resonance?"

Actually, Morris was a mere 9-year-old in Seattle, Wash., when, bowled over by a performance by Jose Limon, he dedicated himself to becoming a choreographer. His studies — from flamenco to classical ballet to stints in the modern dance companies of Laura Dean, Lar Lubovitch and Hannah Kahn — molded a voracious and varied sensibility. His tastes in music run from Yoko Ono and The Violent Femmes to Handel, Bach, Vivaldi.

Morris brought this wide-ranging vision to his own company, which gave its first official performance in 1980. But he also brought a commitment to creating a dance company that defied the typical, masochistic mold.

"Dancers are told: this is a thankless



While Mark Morris will push his students to the limit, the mood during classes is not always serious. Dance troupe member Kraig Patterson and Morris have some fun while demonstrating a move for the class.

profession; you're always in pain; you live in squalor; you're washed up at 35 ... And dance is usually thought of as less rigorous intellectually than other art forms. And there's a smaller audience because it's boring."

Morris says he set out to prove that none of this has to be true: "Dance is quite important, quite interesting and quite rigorous ... And dancers don't have to be 18-year-olds with tiny thighs. They can be adults with brains."

New name, new home

Neither should a dance company be encumbered with bureaucracy and commercialism, Morris decided. So, unlike most professional dance troupes in this country, Morris has done without the traditional trappings — a board of directors, a public relations staff, wealthy pa-

trons, corporate sponsors — relying instead on word of mouth, glowing reviews and "good work" to draw large enough audiences to keep them going.

Now, suddenly, the Brussels deal has changed all that. The company — which will be renamed Monnaie Dance Group/Mark Morris — has gone from one with no trappings to one with the works: a \$1.5 million annual budget; an expanded troupe of 20 dancers; the use of a full orchestra and chorus, a scenery and costume shop; a school if he wants one; regular performances at the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie (built, Morris notes, "semi-ironically," on the site of a defunct mint). And instead of paying \$30 an hour, \$720 a week, for studio space in Manhattan, he'll have the rent-free use of six studios in a gigantic old street car

COVER STORY



In a Brockport gymnasium, Morris demonstrates an exercise on torso movement, while students get ready for their turn.

Karen Mitchell/Times-Union

repair shop.

General manager Alterman explains that this "offer too good to refuse" came at an ideal time. "We had not liked what we were doing: rehearse a little, tour a lot — the one-night stands in Iowa for 200 people."

Alterman was looking into some kind of affiliation with an institution, to enable them to spend more time in one place, when along came Gerard Mortier, director of La Monnaie. He spotted the company performing in Stuttgart, West Germany, and offered Morris the job "on the spot."

And Morris couldn't be happier.

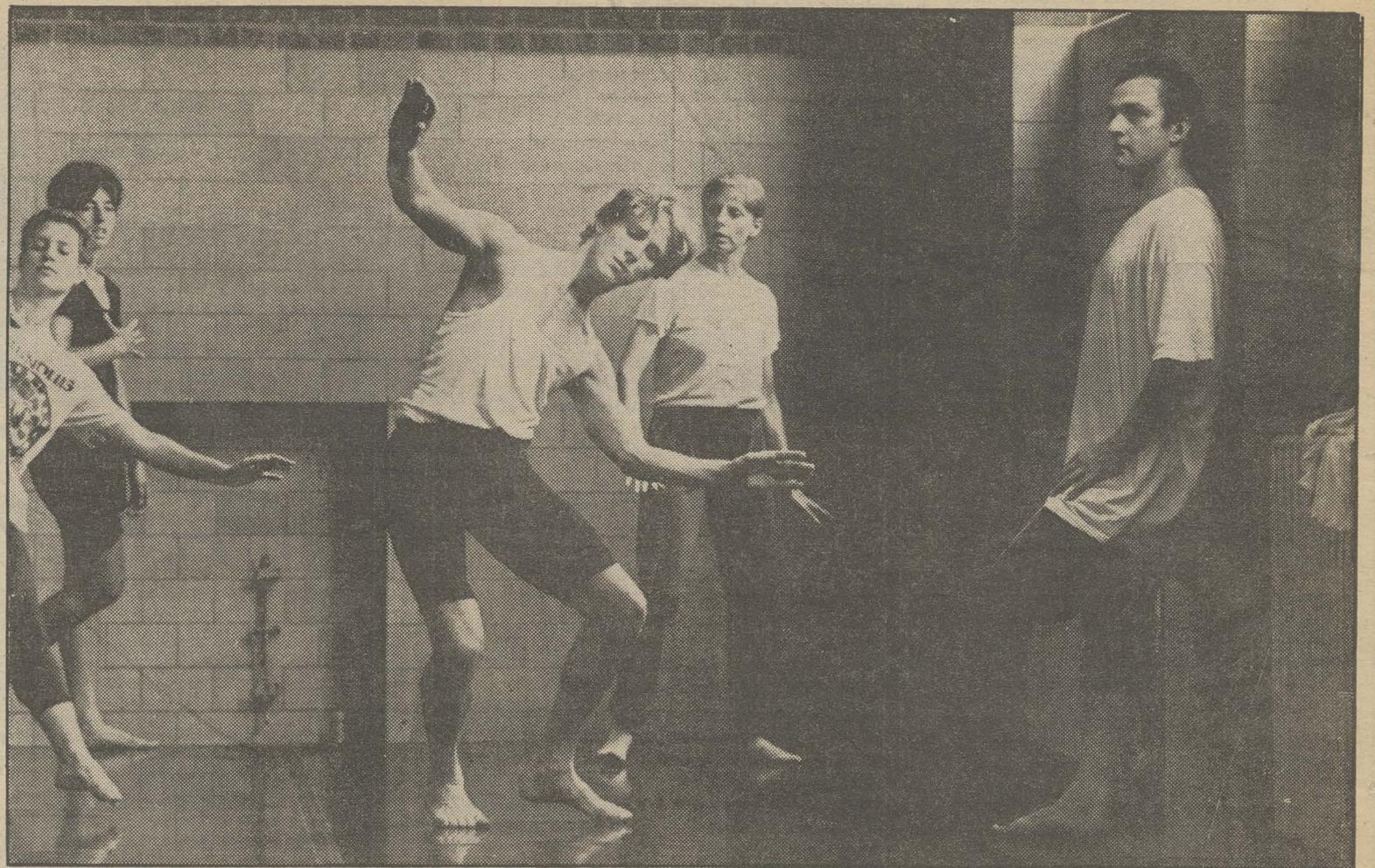
"I'm hoping to be there forever. It's a great situation. Why not? I'd never have something like this in the states — not the support, the money or the interest."

But will all this success and comfort spoil Mark Morris?

"This is what people get mixed up on," says Morris, swigging his beer and sucking his cigarette. "They think the money-fame-success thing has something to do with making a dance."

"But when you're in the studio, it's still: Here's the music. What's the first step?"

The Mark Morris Dance Group will offer a free, informal concert Aug. 12 at 6 p.m. in the Hartwell Hall dance gym of the State University College at Brockport. Students from Morris' two-week workshop will perform excerpts from his work in a free, informal concert Friday at 6 p.m. in Hartwell Hall's dance gym.



Morris (right) in a rare moment — standing still, evaluating the technique of some of his students.