

Morris rejoins troupe for SPAC performance

By Ron Emery

Special to The Times Union

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Mark Morris took the Little Theatre stage Tuesday, joining his company in their weeklong SPAC appearance. For Monday's opening, he'd been sidelined by a foot injury.

It was a program that defines Morris: his original mind and flair for the dramatic. "Deck of Cards" is something of a signature piece. It is in three sections, the first for a lone, electronically operated toy truck that scoots about the stage, its little lights shining at the audience as Jimmy Logsdon sings about a trucker's unhappy lot.

The second part is a solo for Morris in drag, to country music about a deserted housewife, sung by George Jones. We adjust remarkably fast to Morris in a red dress, his long, dark, curly hair flapping. This is clearly a man expressing a

woman's emotions; it is not meant as outrageous parody, and we don't read it that way.

The third part, brilliantly danced by Donald Mouton, dressed in World War I soldier's uniform with cap on top and boxer shorts on the bottom, is set to T. Texas Jones singing the famous country-western song about the GI who uses a deck of cards as a substitute Bible and day book. Morris cleverly uses the gimmick of the "Old MacDonald" children's song that piles one gesture on another, repeating the whole bunch before adding a new one.

"New Love Song Waltzes" is a Romantic work with a contemporary sensibility of both heterosexual and homosexual love. Its mood is voluptuous and innocent at the same time. It begins, as so many of Morris' dances do, with a single dancer, a woman, who swirls in ecstasy, elevated, released, happy.

Morris says in reviving this piece last year, after letting it lapse for about five years, he was

himself a bit surprised about the Romanticism of the piece.

Modern dancers, since the beginnings of the form over 50 years ago, have deliberately avoided the partnering of classical ballet: The cavalier presents the princess ballerina. In other ways, including similar movement for both men and women, the moderns have made Romanticism anathema (the relationship of the sexes in Martha Graham dances is combative — the war of the sexes).

In these Brahms songs, Morris has found a way of returning post-modern dance to expressing sensuality and affection more freely, certainly more freely than the Pina Bausche and Twyla Tharp dances that can chill the soul.

"New Love Waltzes" provides a fine opportunity to display the company, which dances this piece with a keen sense that it has a beginning, middle and end; post-modern dancing at its best.

Morris' "Frison" is made on four dancers —

Tina Fehlandt, David Landis, Donald Mouton and Teri Weksler in this performance — and has a more standard, cooler look, with the dancers in gold body suits. As always, Morris has a keen musical ear and has set Igor Stravinsky's "Symphonies for Wind Instruments" in a rather austere, sculpted setting, with the dancers moving slowly and forming stage pictures, almost tableaux.

The performance ended with a repeat of the previous night's "Canonic ¾ Studies." It was again a delightful parody, sharper and more attentively danced than on Monday. Everything was more exact in this performance, and consequently the wit more telling.

This program repeats tonight at 8:15 p.m. in the Little Theater at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Saratoga Springs. Tickets are \$15 and are available from Ticketron outlets and the SPAC box office, 587-3330.



MARK MORRIS

... had been sidelined

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Actors' Shakespeare Company hoping for another Albany season

By Martin P. Kelly

Staff writer

"We definitely want to come back next summer," says John Plummer. His Actors' Shakespeare Company, currently appearing in a rolling rep season through Sunday in Albany's Washington Park, moves on to a tour of duty Aug. 24-27 at Gunderland

Performing Arts Center in Tawasentha Park.

"By the end of the summer, we'll have a pretty good idea if we'll return next year," he says. "Certainly, we feel we've met our goals and have attracted audiences to our two plays."

The company is presenting "Romeo and Juliet" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" on alternate nights on the parade grounds in Washington Park. The outdoor productions are bare-bone affairs, with little scenery and contemporary costumes.

"We wanted to bring quality Shakespearian productions to Albany, done in a contemporary style," Plummer says. "We think we've succeeded from the response we've gotten so far, especially from young people."

Plummer says the company hoped to make the Shakespearian characters more accessible to audiences by highlighting the actors and not the cos-

tumes and sets so familiar to such productions.

"Many nights, youngsters come backstage and explain that the characters mean much more to them now than when they read the plays in school," Plummer says.

The Actors' Shakespeare Company consists of a troupe of young actors, average age 23, many of whom met when going to Tufts University. Plummer, Peter Greenberg and Jennifer Langsam, who appear in the winter with the Sacramento Regional Theatre Company in California, were looking for a place to do Shakespeare in the summer.

During a visit last Christmas to Albany (Langsam is the daughter of state Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol), they met Vivienne Anderson, who became "our spiritual leader." Anderson, who coordinates the Imagination Celebration each year throughout the state, introduced the trio to Mayor Thomas M. Whalen III, and he agreed to help them. He provided the space in Washington Park.

Next season, the trio would like to do another Shakespearian play, in addition to a contemporary work. They will also have to raise more money than this season, when \$9,000 served as a budget. All the funding came from private donations supplemented by donated in-kind services.

The actors, according to Plummer, received about \$30 a week, but "we did get free housing" from area residents who boarded individual actors.

Since Plummer, Greenberg and Langsam (the latter two play Romeo and Juliet) are basically actors, the immediate need, according to Plummer, is the hiring of a director.

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