

ASHTON

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A *Midsummer Night's Dream*—the Joffrey will be doing it this season—the fairies are not the silvered moon-riders that Bronislava Nijinska created for her *Midsummer* dances (in Max Reinhardt's 1935 movie) or the phosphorescent dream bugs that Balanchine made for his. No, they are English schoolgirls, well-bred, noses in the air, doing their steps. Likewise the five splendid chickens who open *Fille* with their barnyard dance. They are chickens—Ashton has bothered to notice how a chicken wakes up, and how it walks, and that a wing has no joints—but they are human chickens. Indeed, they are doing a music-hall number.

Ashton is thus in the great tradition of English satirists—and of English tellers of animal tales, a branch of English satire. But in keeping with that tradition, his wit is full of charity. There is nothing in his world so humble that it doesn't have its own manners and morals, its own reasons for doing the things it does. Even chickens have a *Weltanschauung*.

The ballet technique itself seems to become a story about the world. Ashton loves detail—beautiful movements of the arms,

the shoulders, the head, in concert with the legs—and this richness seems to speak of life's richness, its wealth of textures. At times he loves staccato movements, and then you seem to be hearing some wonderful, witty conversation. All the time, he loves *mesure*, the careful sense of proportion. Before the big lift comes, there will be three little lifts. And even the big lift will be on a human scale. In arabesque, the woman's leg rarely rises above the hip joint—that is, parallel with the floor. (Think of how different this is from Balanchine's women, their toes always over their heads.) This style, with its unprissy refinement, came to be identified as the English style in ballet. At the same time, it's a vision of life.

Ashton may also have wearied of this loved world. David Vaughan, his biographer, quotes Margot Fonteyn as saying, "For Fred, no day is complete without a tinge of melancholy." There are works by Ashton that leave the world far behind and where the ballet technique is no longer a human language but an unbroken code. I am thinking of *Monotones I* and *II*, set to the music of Eric Satie. (*Monotones II* will be televised on Channel 13's *Dance in America*, tentatively scheduled for next spring in a program on the Joffrey.) In each of

them, three dancers dressed in sleek unitards and strange, rounded caps—astronauts, they seem, or the moon militia—perform a set of purely abstract dances. The steps seem more ingenious, more "wrought," than the usual Ashton. *Monotones II* begins, for example, with the woman flattened on the floor in a split. She is then raised and turned in that split, so that she looks like a pole of legs with a woman attached. (According to Vaughan, the choreographer said this was inspired by a dream he had about a chicken on a spit.)

But these puzzles solve themselves. The music will fall back into its refrain, and on the final beat the dancers, all together, will leap, landing in a pose so modest and pure—a wide plie, a low arabesque—that you break out in a sweat. After such complication, such simplicity: you feel you're being told the secret of the universe.

Beginning in 1926, Ashton made some 200 works, most of them for England's Royal Ballet, which he also directed from 1963 to 1970. In recent years he choreographed very little, preferring to sit on his patio or work in his garden. "At least in the garden there is peace," he wrote. "All I need is no interruptions. What I really welcome is a postal strike." ■

INSIDE DANCE

by Susan Reiter

Some of the Joffrey Ballet's most familiar faces will be missing when the company opens its six-week City Center season on October 26. Philip Jerry, Mark Goldweber, Charlene Gehm, and Dawn Caccamo all gave their final performances with the Joffrey during its summer tour. Goldweber, departing after 11 years, has joined Pacific Ballet Theatre, which is based in Portland, Ore., and directed by former Joffrey member James Canfield. Caccamo, who joined the Joffrey in 1983 and became the company's most prominent leading lady of recent years, is now with the Houston Ballet. Gehm, a 12-year Joffrey veteran, just joined the ballet chorus of *Phantom of the Opera* (where another Joffrey alum, Luis Perez, is a featured dancer in the show).

Philip Jerry, who joined the Joffrey in 1975, has left to pursue his choreographic interests, he says. Those dance watchers who didn't blink in 1985 saw his promising first work for the company, *Hexameron*, which quickly disappeared from the repertory. Jerry reports the company's busy touring and rehearsal schedule didn't allow him to take



Mark Morris

direct response to company director Robert Joffrey's untimely death in March. New additions to the 38-member company's roster include Edward Morgan, a former Joffrey member who is returning after a three-year hiatus; New Zealander Glenn Harris, who has danced with the Australian and Zurich ballets; and two recruits from the company's affiliated junior troupe, the Joffrey II: Lissette Salgado and Adam Sklute...

The Mark Morris Dance Group gave its final American performance for a while, at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center on August 20. On September 6 the company was reborn across the Atlantic, at the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, where it is now known as the Monnaie Dance Group/Mark Morris. "The first time Mark and I went there, we immediately got terrified, because we knew it was an offer that we couldn't refuse," says general manager Barry Alterman. "We had been casting about in the U.S. a lot, trying to affiliate with a larger body in order to break out of our heavy-touring, scanty-rehearsal cycle. This offer just dropped serendipitously out of the sky."

Morris was engaged under a generous three-year contract, and the dancers have one-year contracts for 52-week employment—still a rarity for their counterparts in the U.S. The formerly 12-member troupe now numbers 18, and for the opening Brussels production—Morris' full-evening work set to Handel's oratorio *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato*—it will expand to 27. Performances will be di-



Edward Morgan

on additional choreography projects and that in recent years he had to turn down several opportunities. "It reached a point where I wanted to be able to say yes," he says.

In every ballet company, dancers come and go all the time. The exodus of so many leading dancers from the Joffrey is more a matter of their all having reached critical points in their careers, Jerry notes, rather than a

DANCE AROUND TOWN

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MOLISSA FENLEY. Fenley is a remarkable soloist, at once feral and poetic. Her new work, *State of Darkness*, set to Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*, is a rest-

less, virtuosic exploration of the individual's struggle for self-knowledge. Whitney Museum of American Art, Equitable Center, 787 Seventh Ave. (570-3633) THU-22: 7:30 p.m. Free.

BETSY HULTON AND DANCERS. Hulton's dances center on delicate gradations of feeling; in this concert she presents the premiere of *Found Wanting*, a dreamlike and enigmatic evoca-

tion of memory and forgetfulness, for five dancers. *Up and Fulling* is a trio to music of John Bailin. P.S. 122, 150 First Ave. (477-5288) FRI-16-SUN-18: 9 p.m. \$8 or (TDF) + \$2.

URBAN BUSH WOMEN. The provocative and incisive company, under the direction Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, presents the New York premiere of *Heat*, a multidisciplinary dance-theater work that catches fire from its incendiary title metaphor. The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. (255-5793) THU-22-SUN-25, WED-23-SUN-2: 8:30 p.m. \$10 or (TDF) + \$5.

THE YARD. An annual choreographers' retreat in Martha's Vineyard, Mass., brings an impressive group of established and developing dancers and choreographers to New York. Choreographers in the wide-ranging three-program series include the visceral and impulsive David Dorfman, wild woman Holly Fairbank, former Graham principal Judith Garay, soloist Lorn MacDougal, dancer and monologist Jeff McMahon, the Yard's director and founder, Patricia N. Nanon, newcomer Jennifer Sargent, former Cunningham dancer Gus Solomons jr, and the duet team of Danial Shapiro & Joanie Smith. NikoLais/Louis Choreospace, 38 E. 19th St. (206-7885) THU-15: 7:30 p.m. FRI-16, SAT-17: 8 p.m. SUN-18: 3 and 8 p.m. \$10 or (TDF) + \$2. (opening-night benefit, \$75, includes reception).

ONE-WOMAN SHOW



Molissa Fenley at the Equitable Center on September 22.