



The New York Times/Jiri Jiru

Mark Morris, left, an American choreographer, at his studio in Brussels. His company has been well received at the Monnaie Theater.

Americans in Brussels Delight Dance Fans

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY

Special to The New York Times

BRUSSELS, Nov. 27 — The American choreographer Mark Morris and his dance company have scored a triumph here in their new role as residents of the Monnaie Theater, succeeding Maurice Béjart.

The world premiere on Wednesday night of Mr. Morris's "L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato," set to Handel's music and based on Milton's odes, got long applause and glowing reviews. *Le Soir*, the leading French-language newspaper, compared Mr. Morris's arrival to the glittery days when Belgium was part of the Burgundian and Hapsburg kingdoms and the monarch made festive visits here to be received by the local nobility.

The departure of Mr. Béjart last year in a huff for Lausanne, Switzerland, was a traumatic event in the cultural life of Brussels. The French-born choreographer and his Ballet of the 20th Century had made a name for the city in the realm of dance from the time Mr. Béjart arrived from France in 1959.

The cause of the departure was a power dispute with Gérard Mortier, a 42-year-old former lawyer who runs the Monnaie Theater. Mr. Mortier's opera company at the Monnaie has become one of the most prominent in Europe, building on small-scale productions of Mozart.

After the dispute Mr. Mortier wooed Mr. Morris, offering him Mr. Béjart's old rehearsal studio, generous contracts for the members of the Mark Morris Dance Group and the opportunity for a full winter season with live orchestral music.

At the beginning of September, Mr. Morris, a 32-year-old from Seattle, and many of the American dancers who had been with him during his eight years in New York moved to Brussels. Mr. Mortier had found apartments for them, given them contracts with at least twice their New York wages (average salaries here are believed to be about \$25,000 a year) and had given Mr. Morris the security of a theatrical home.

Mr. Morris said it was the security that made him hesitate since, he said, he thrives on risk. But his company manager, Barry Alterman, said it is nice not looking for rehearsal space the first thing in the morning.

Mr. Morris's work is considered more formal and less gimmicky than Mr. Béjart's, so that the Brussels public has had to adjust. Mr. Morris is known for his adherence to literature and music — he has said he learned more about choreography from Handel than from other people's dances — and he was uncompromising in his first work here.

15-Minute Overture

The evening begins with Handel's Concerto Grosso in B as an overture; it lasts 15 minutes with the curtain

The Mark Morris troupe is said to have brought back the good old days.

closed and no dancing. When the set is revealed it is six muted slots on each side of the stage and a series of vertical black lines behind, like the staves on music manuscript paper. Dancers in berry-colored costumes come out leaping singly, in couples and threesomes and other permutations, like notes on the paper. During the work's 2 hours 20 minutes there are ensemble sections and something like square-dancing.

Mr. Morris refuses to discuss the meaning of his work. "Every moment changes your perspective," he said. "Every seat changes your perspective." The Monnaie, built in the 19th century and recently renovated, has 1,176 seats.

For the 24 dancers in the company it is a different life from New York: not having to call up every day to find out where the company is meeting and not having to work in restaurants to make ends meet. "Our opportunities are definitely better," said Ruth Davidson, a 32-year-old New Yorker

who has been with Mr. Morris since 1980. "But I've been writing home to my parents that this is the Cincinnati of Europe."

Despite the Weather

Many of the American dancers already seem to have seen enough of the city's persistent cold winter rains and provincial attitudes. "I understand now that it's cold and it's gray," said Keith Sabado, 34. "But my French is getting a little bit better and my spousal unit (a man and a cat) arrives soon and I miss them desperately."

"Yeah," said Mr. Morris, an outspoken, welcoming man who wore the pink triangle of the gay activist on his lapel for his first news conference here, "people are freaked out here. They're not happy every second. But who is happy every second?"

On Tuesday night, for the preview, Mr. Morris skipped the champagne reception sponsored by a leading bank to drink beer with his dancers. He already speaks a serviceable French — "I've been to France a million times," he said — and was looking forward to the company's tour next month in Spain, where he studied flamenco as a teen-ager.

"I don't know," Mr. Morris said. "I'm so relieved to be out of the States, with the election and all. It's so depressing there. I'm sure that Belgium will change my work. Indigestion will change my work, if you want to know the truth."