

JOWITT

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violent wrestling bout. Like rounds in a match, changes of strategy (read variations on the theme) are often signaled by one of these handshakes.

Much of what the men do is heart-stoppingly dangerous. Newson sets himself to fall and challenges Charnock to catch him. Running about, bracing himself, diving, gasping, Charnock sometimes misses by a hair's breadth, and Newson crashes to the floor. The pace becomes impossibly fast, the falls horrifying. But when it's over, and Charnock leaps into Newson's arms too exhausted to cling, Newson lets him fall. Several times. Charnock repeatedly dives onto a mattress; Newson comes over and lies just where the dive will end, at the last minute rolling to right or left. All this while, in the foreground, a couple dining at a small table exchange quiet, flirtatious small talk.

Sometimes the games are less violent, even funny; sometimes they are erotic. Occasional bursts of music knock home both fierce and tender aspects of this eroticism. One taped singer shrieks out lines like "Get 'em up sex machine" over electronic pistol shots of sound, while another wistfully intones such phrases as "My sex is a fragile flower..."

Deep End is less single-minded, less tautly organized, and has occasional muddy or predictable spots, but it too is impressive. And fearless. Part of its strength comes from the diversity of its performers: Charnock, square-faced and resigned, with a bristle of red hair; Newson, lean, bald, and dour; small, neat, serious, black-haired Michelle Richecoeur, and Liz Ranken—tall and funny, with a long mess of brown hair. The first three are ace dancers, Ranken is a great mover with a highly individual kind of strength and grace.

The piece is definitely about gender warfare, but neither men nor women come out on top. The men fall and then bang their arms on the floor to be helped up. The women hurry to do so, Richecoeur with efficiency, Ranken galumphing happily after her, arms reaching too late. But the men fall more and more often, and the women's task becomes exhausting and futile. One of the best sections features two duets. In the background Richecoeur and Newson repeat a grave adagio that gradually turns cruel, while in the foreground, Charnock and Ranken lock themselves into an absurd erotic tangle and have a polite, but fevered "was it all right for you?" conversation.

Violence predominates: the men repeatedly jump onto blindfolded Richecoeur; Ranken strips off Newson's clothes, and drags him over to Charnock like a lioness bringing home a kill, fondling it and slapping her mate away. But there's tenderness in the work too. As with Marshall's piece, there's something almost cleansing about the unequivocal physicality.

SUPREE

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pairs of long, gleaming poles. They pretend to climb them, or possibly they're masturbating as they rub their hands smoothly downward again and again. No. They glance sideways and down to show they've arrived at the top. They part the sticks into wide Vs, becoming archers, or charioteers. They vibrate the flexible poles into reversing arcs, then walk back and forth across the stage shaking them horizontally so they make a sea of waves. Crossing the ends of the poles behind their necks, they create a quiet row of perfect Mt. Fujis.

Which leads into the dreamiest and most powerful image: the men bending forward, balanced on one leg, with the poles sticking out like skeletal wings that slowly flap. There's an ineffable peacefulness to this scene; it's like watching a glider moving at its incredibly leisurely pace through the noiseless sky.

I can't help identifying the images

when they're relatively literal. With one end under their feet, the men bend the poles into deep C-curves and jam the other ends against their ears. That doesn't register as anything particular, but in a moment I glimpse skis and ski poles, and that's gone: They're pumping the poles as if squeezing a surging oceanic climax out of the Debussy. When they form a line from the front to the rear of the stage holding the deeply bent sticks on either side, they're galley slaves and the boom boom in the music is the guy keeping their oars in sync.

In this first section, I'm caught in the dream. The music's flow, the way it gathers force and subsides, supports a stream of vivid but ambiguous images that follow one another without any evident reason. That's okay because they're sufficiently removed from narrative and don't illustrate any fragmentary personal relationships between the performers. I'm relieved of any desire to figure out what's going on and can just soak them up.

The rest of the piece is quite different and less satisfying. It's a beatific vision of buttocks and breasts, for which I'm very grateful, but relationships do intrude. So I'm periodically pulled out of the detachment of my lulled state into wondering just what's exactly going on.

What I find myself enjoying most are amusing, low-key moments like the beginning of the *Faune* section, when the four men are lying in back with the poles like fantasy penises gently waving in the air. Maybe they're just lazy guys fishing and snoozing. But when two barebreasted women—Carol Parker and Jude Sante—sit close, touch hands, caress themselves,

press their chests together, and kiss, those fishing poles come erect. The women spend a lot of time upside down with their legs in the air—sliding, rubbing, and knotting their bare limbs. The men do a lot of Nijinsky faun-type stuff, like flexing their torsos. They poke their heads through the diamonds and triangles the women design with their legs. There are more *Faune* references later, too, like when Pucci pulls off Sante's long white skirt and rubs himself with it before tossing it away.

In the third part, the men, in pairs, frame two cloth pods, through which the women peer like lascivious anchorites. The pods open into big, white circles: They were merely the women's skirts folded around them. While Pucci crouches behind Sante and removes her skirt, Parker traipses over the other three prone bodies with their limbs waving. With Sante on her knees, Pucci, now nude as well, swings and rocks her, smooths her body, plucks her, plays her like a harp to cues in the music. He folds himself over her as she swims in the air balanced on his thighs. Nice echoes of the flying in part one. Swimming's just flying underwater.

Meantime the other four are making some balancing design on the other side of the stage. But who could be watching the people with clothes on when there're gorgeous buck-nekkid people to eyeball? In the half-light I wonder if the other guys are naked now too. No. And why is Parker still wearing her skirt? Is there an artistic reason? Or would she feel too uncomfortable totally undressed? This is all so distracting. I don't want to think. ■



Susan Hadley and Tina Fehlandt in Morris's *L'Allegro*

Brussels's Gain

BY ROBERT GRESKOVIC

MONNAIE DANCE GROUP, MARK MORRIS. Morris's *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso* ed *Il Moderato*. Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels, November 22 through December 20.

Don't call it a ballet," Mark Morris said firmly, of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso* ed *Il Moderato*, the two-part, evening-long program of dances that he created for the debut of his newly expanded company—officially called the Monnaie Dance Group, Mark Morris—in residence at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie of Brussels, Belgium. In Morris's terms the performances he and his company give are simply called "shows," and this one, to an extended piece of gorgeous baroque music, the oratorio by George Frederick Handel that gives the work its title, should be no exception.

Show, dance, work—none of these terms struck me as apt for this grand-scale creation, Morris's first full-evening opus, especially as here presented with full orchestra and chorus in the beautifully outfitted Monnaie opera house—an Italian-style theater with a deep, handsomely raked stage and an acoustically rich auditorium. But, then, on seeing the Gothic age guild halls that face this town's Grand Place, the right word came to me: For his admission into this old-world city once renowned for its guilds, Morris had fashioned a *meesterstuk*, a work constructed so as to reveal the full range of his expertise, simply and literally a "masterpiece."

L'Allegro is recognizably by Morris.

Its beginning as a set of simple, accelerating, crisscrossing runs upstage for the cast is a fresh version of familiar Morris fare. But, as it proceeds to plumb Handel's vocal and orchestral fancies while acknowledging the particular poetics of the text (mostly John Milton's, for the sentiments of the "Cheerful Man" and the "Pensive Man," and to a lesser extent, those of Charles Jennens, for the added voice of the "Moderate Man"), Morris's 30-odd sectioned dance creates marvelous separate episodes that interlock with a singular poetic momentum.

The individual and often contrasting dances that Morris has devised to the self-contained airs, choruses, and recitatives of Handel's oratorio provide the work with rich variety, even as they sustain its confident thrust. Certain sections are like nothing Morris has concocted to date: one, a hunt scene, turns its dancers into a shifting landscape of flora, fauna, and boulders as two foxy women anxiously elude a pack of scrambling hounds coolly driven by a couple of elegant hunters. Other times Morris uses contrasting dance material to connect related sections in different parts of his program. In Part I, a thrilling chorus—"Haste thee, nymph..."—gets peppered with wonderfully pulsing accents for the feet. In Part II, an equally, but differently, stirring chorus—"Populous cities..."—throws out apposite accents, as its dancers raise fists high in the air as if to poke through the sky.

For its choreographic journey through Handel's pastorate, *L'Allegro* is further

impelled by a complex series of simply colored scrim drops designed by Adrienne Lobel, enlivened by a luminous array of lighting effects designed by James F. Ingalls. Christine Van Loon's costumes, layered chiffon shifts of various cuts for the women, and variously cut-off tights and bloused tops for the men, give the dance a sense of bygone pastoral times.

Morris's company, about double the size it was when he last performed here, numbers 24 dancers, with nine listed as "supplementary dancers for this production." Except for a remarkable, aerial solo for either Donald Mouton or Jon Mensinger as a bounding bird, as well as a few vignettes where Penny Hutchinson vibrates like a bee, or Teri Weksler flutters like another bird, or where Keith Sabado is showcased as a dreamy Orpheus, Morris has created an ensemble work, wherein his green dancers are already taking on the glow of his group's veterans. ■

It Floats

BY GUS SOLOMONS jr

SETTLEMENT HOUSE DANCES. Works by Grazia Della Terza, Mitchell Kirsch, Amy Pivar, and Kay McCabe. At University Settlement House, December 1 through 11.

In their continuing tradition of infinite resourcefulness, dancers have discovered yet another nook in which to perform. At the University Settlement House on Eldridge Street a gritty group of eight choreographers, with a few yards of muslin and a dozen lights, have turned assembly hall into theater with chairs for about 50 set on and in front of the former stage.

In the opener of the first of two programs, *Fragments of Perambulation*, choreographer Grazia Della Terza and Maurizio Saiu—she petite, he even more so—playfully lift each other and push-pull one another's limbs around in an unpretentious trifle of a dance set to music by Ladysmith Black Mambazo, a Gerardo Servin tango, and a Monteverdi chorale. *Brook Bend* by Mitch Kirsch, though too long by half, arranges some nice, tumbly phrases in solos and trios for himself and two women to a catchy, mock-martial frill for trumpets and drums by Rhys Chatham.

Rock-solid and kinetics-wise Amy Pivar zaps her compact weightlifter's body through a frenetic pose routine at just under the speed of light in her solo *Touch the Frog*. Nice. And in her duet *Buffaloes Roam*, which kicks off with a short autobiographical Patti Lucia poem recited by Daphne Rubin-Vega, Pivar and dynamic Sean Curran—her match in minisize and maxipower—paint a wonderfully neurotic/erotic relationship, accompanied only by their own increasingly audible breathing in a petulant, mean, tender, and passionate tantrum of rough, high-contact lifts and athletic body-checks.

Kay McCabe's *Aphrodite to Discus Thrower* is a feminist treatise, albeit light-hearted, whose focus needs sharpening, but if there's a Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Plants someone oughta report McCabe for annihilating several mums and a gladiolus. Three bejeweled socialites scissor-snip or chomp the blossoms as they cross the stage during a satiric duet by McCabe and Vicki Kurtz, which sends up a couple of beauty queens undergoing a feminist conversion as they move from pretty, passive posing to gestural assertiveness under a drizzle of flowers tossed limply from the wings. The piece is accompanied by lyrics of Yeats and Purcell, which were arranged and appended by George Russell to fit the sentiment, and are speak-sung live and on tape collage.

I'm glad to report that the modest, good-natured, buoyant dances by these relative newcomers to choreography were worth the trek on a bitter December evening. ■