

ARTS / LEISURE

Dancer Mark Morris Outrages Brussels

By Paul L. Montgomery

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BRUSSELS — The American choreographer Mark Morris is ending his first season in Brussels with the headline "Mark Morris Go Home" still echoing from the front page of the city's leading newspaper.

Morris arrived last fall to ecstatic reviews as the successor to Maurice Béjart, the French dancer and choreographer who had ruled dance in Belgium for 27 years.

By virtue of some unkind words about Béjart, a dance that ended with everyone on stage flamboyantly and completely naked, and questions about what Morris was smoking in his cigarettes, the season ended with virtually the entire

Belgian press lined up against the 32-year-old American.

Morris, who has been called the most important choreographer of the 1980s by critics like Arlene Croce of *The New Yorker* and Alastair Macaulay of *The Financial Times*, is unbowed.

"Isn't it great!" he said of the mingled boos and cheers after his "Mythologies" trilogy closed.

Morris is the dance director at the Monnaie Théâtre, which is headed by Gérard Mortier.

Mortier said that, of the theater's \$25.6-million annual budget for opera, dance and concerts, about \$2 million went for Morris's company.

More than three-quarters of the theater budget comes from government subsidies, with the rest made

up by sponsors, admissions and renting scenery.

Morris told the assembled Belgian arts press that he found the latest reaction to his work "slightly xenophobic" after the early raves.

He said he believed that artists should be free to put on work, and that artists should be free to criticize it.

"My personal truth is perhaps not popular with journalists, but it's better than making up lies so I can be popular," Morris told the journalists. "I'm a choreographer, you see, not a journalist. My work is what I have to say."

Morris has done premieres of "L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato" to music by Handel and "Dido and Aeneas" to music by Purcell as well as two compilations of previous work.

The choreographer said he had purposely led up to his most radical work, "Mythologies," with milder precedents.

Morris has a three-year contract with the Monnaie and is planning his next season.

He is to give benefit performances this month at the Dance Theatre Workshop in New York City and a week of "Dido and Aeneas" in Boston.

His 24-dancer company goes on to Montpellier, France; Spoleto, Italy, and Barcelona and Seville this summer and is to perform a full program in Brussels in the 1989-90 season.

Morris said he found the controversy over his dance thrilling. "What I try to do is clarify," he added. "It's just a show after all. It has a right to exist."

The reasons for the sudden turn against his work in Brussels are mysterious. Béjart, reportedly wounded by Morris's dismissive comments about his work, had the Lausanne Ballet Company, which he heads, subsidize a trip by Belgian critics to Switzerland to see his new ballets.

The two choreographers are poles apart: Morris's company dances barefoot in minimal costumes, Béjart's is on pointe in elaborate dress.

The largely staid Brussels dance audience is unused to Morris.

Morris thinks there is also a problem with his open homosexuality. "Here it's O.K. to be homosexual if you wear a suit and have a firm handshake and don't give any trouble," he said. "I'm not like that."



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