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Mark Morris to Perform In Dance Workshop Benefit

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Dance Theater Workshop, established in 1965, began as a showcase for a group of modern-dance choreographers and their friends. But even those who have seen the organization grow from its modest beginnings in a narrow Chelsea loft with protruding ceiling pipes into a leading theater for new dance might be surprised at the programs it will present tomorrow and Thursday.

Who would have thought, for instance, that a young Seattle-born choreographer whose early works were performed at the workshop would become an internationally known exponent of American modern dance? And that this choreographer, Mark Morris, would return to perform in a benefit whose chairman was Mikhail Baryshnikov, artistic director of American Ballet Theater?

But that will happen this week when the Monnaie Dance Group/Mark Morris, now the resident dance company of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, performs a program of early work by Mr. Morris at the workshop. On Wednesday and Thursday, the dancers will perform "New Love Song Waltzes," "Lovey," "One Charming Night" and "Gloria" in a gala that begins with a cocktail party at the workshop and ends with a black-tie dinner and dancing at Harvey's Chelsea, one of Mr. Morris's favorite New York hangouts. The performances are the company's only New York area appearances this season, though it will present his "Dido and Aeneas" at the Emerson Majestic Theater in Boston on June 6-10.

Facing Economic Hardship

"I've done lots of work there," Mr. Morris, whose company performed at the workshop from 1981 to 1985, said when asked about the benefit. "I got produced there. And it was fabulous. Who else would put me on? Nobody. And they need the money. What else is a benefit for? To raise money. So give them a lot of money."

The workshop was founded by Jeff Duncan, who died Friday, Jack Moore, who died last June, and Art Bauman.

Now, as then, the workshop is faced with economic hardship. It is confronting a 50 percent rise in its rent. There has been a general drying-up of financing for arts institutions. If all goes as planned, Dance Theater Workshop will move into new headquarters, with Creative Time, in a ferry-dock facility in Battery Park by 1995. But funds from this week's benefit will go toward meeting a \$200,000 deficit and simple day-to-day financial problems or what David White, director of the workshop, calls "pure survival issues."

The workshop has grown. Today it has a membership of 500 dancers and other artists and a \$2.4 million budget. But it has continued to be an informal center for new art, whether it is photographs hung on the walls of the light-filled exhibition space, with its benches, coffee urn and hanging plants, or a poetry reading, play, musical concert or evening of dance or performance art in the 150-seat theater. Workshop events tend to



Beatriz Schiller

Mark Morris, who is to return for a benefit performance at the Dance Theater Workshop.

resemble tribal gatherings, whether they are the annual Bessie Award ceremony or intent intermission conversations.

The workshop offered a place to perform both for choreographers like Mr. Morris and David Gordon before they were widely known and for better-known artists trying out new styles. It served as an early showcase for the talents of Whoopi Goldberg and Bill Irwin and other New Vaudevillians. It initiated the National Performance Network, a touring program that allows experimentalist performers to present their work to 21 cities across the nation. Its Suitcase Fund, one of several commissioning projects, has brought work by Israeli and Arab, African and Latin American artists to the United States and has enabled American choreographers to perform internationally.

Informal Community Center

Dance Theater Workshop — and similar organizations, like Performance Space 122 and the Field, that followed — also serves as a kind of informal community center for dance. It publishes a survival guide called "The Poor Dancer's Almanac" every few years. Its quarterly newsletter is an continuing extension of the publication. The current issue includes a questionnaire for arts organizations on medical insurance for the arts.

"We are part of an ad hoc task force of organizations that have had a tough time with their insurance policies," Mr. White explained. "A great number of organizations — and individuals — can't get insurance."

"Group rates have gone up so high that people once again can't afford insurance. And we feel that the AIDS issue could be a reason there has been a significant increase in discrimination against arts groups, particularly small ones. With the help of the Lieutenant Governor's office, a group of us sat down with the State Deputy Superintendent of Insurance in April to talk about that. We will push on two fronts: state hearings and pilot projects."