

Review/Dance

Mark Morris Troupe In Jacob's Pillow Bill

By JACK ANDERSON

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BECKET, Mass., June 30 — For the last year, Mark Morris's troupe has been the dance company of the Théâtre de la Monnaie, the opera house of Brussels. Although his headquarters has changed, this young American choreographer has not. He remains as unpredictable as ever. That was clear Thursday night when the 24-member Monnaie Dance Group/Mark Morris performed five works from its repertory at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

Mr. Morris loves to try out ideas. He can be whimsical one moment and poignant or shocking the next. He can also be exasperating, for in addition to choreographing genuinely serious or comic pieces, he creates a surprising amount of trivia.

"Gloria," to a recording of Vivaldi's Gloria in D, presented him at his best. This was a dance of joy — and at the same time, a dance of effort. The 10 members of the cast certainly rejoiced. But before they did so, they crept across the floor and took pains to maintain their balance when they stood. Often, they appeared to be contending with fate itself. Yet sometimes they battled one another, as when dancers almost belligerently pushed other dancers backward.

Nevertheless, there was rejoicing. And the final choreographic fugue implied that struggling, falling, rising and rejoicing are all part of the human condition.

Mr. Morris's playful "Canonic 3/4 Studies" concerned nine dancers obsessed by waltz rhythms. They jigged incessantly, repeating steps over and over. Then, just when they appeared ready to conclude, they repeated the steps once more — this time in a different direction. The recorded score of waltzes arranged and performed in a flamboyant manner by the pianist Harriet Cavalli added to the fun.

In "Lovey," to recordings by the Violent Femmes, Mr. Morris created a loveless world in which people roused themselves to ferocious emotional pitches yet regarded each

other as objects. They treated baby dolls roughly, and their actions were especially disquieting because Mr. Morris suggested that, far from being toys, the dolls symbolized the characters' own abused children.

Two other works were much less successful. Mr. Morris set six women swaying in "Celestial Greetings." Presumably this piece to recorded popular music from Thailand was nothing more than a study in patterning. But the patterns were not very interesting.

Susan Hadley gave a deadpan comic performance as a glamorous haughty woman in "Pièces en Concert," and Keith Sabado and Mr. Morris were her admirers. But Mr. Morris apparently — and mistakenly — thought that to let finicky gestures give way to awkward stamps and mimetic depictions of indigestion would be automatically funny in itself.

This work to music of Couperin is one of several dances to 18th-century secular scores in which Mr. Morris has been content to have his cast do little more than preen. While researchers have revealed to us the richness of authentic 18th-century choreography, Mr. Morris seems unwilling to believe that, far from being mere affectations, courtly bows and flourishes can be signs of dignity and respect. Such a limitation severely restricts the choreographic range he has otherwise tried so admirably to develop.

His group was the first attraction of the summer season at Jacob's Pillow, which has been a major dance center since it was founded by Ted Shawn in 1933. It has long been the custom for the festival's director to welcome the audience at the start of each performance.

On Thursday, Liz Thompson, the festival's director since 1979, was in a somber mood. She criticized reductions in support of the arts by both the government and corporations and said she is disturbed by talk in Congress of making big cuts in money for the National Endowment for the Arts because it has supported some controversial works. "Art by its very nature will always be controversial as well as uplifting," Ms. Thompson told the audience,



Nancy Tutko

Mark Morris, left, Keith Sabado and Susan Hadley rehearsing "Pièces en Concert."