

dance

All in a Day's Work

Mark Morris program celebrates double anniversary

by Rebecca Ragain

During the past 25 years, Seattle native Mark Morris has built an artistic empire.

The 49-year-old is hailed as the most significant choreographer since George Balanchine. He is regularly mentioned in the same breath as Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor.

He has created works for the American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, New York City Opera and English National Opera. His company, Mark Morris Dance Group, performs an average of 90 shows each year in cities across the world.

He has his own building in Brooklyn, N.Y., called the Mark Morris Dance Center. Several stories tall, this headquarters houses a successful dance school, three fully equipped dance studios and a small theater.

When asked how he oversees it all, Morris' answer is indirect but simple: It's his job.

"It's a giant job, of course, but it's what I do," he says. "I'm not doing this at gunpoint. It's my pleasure. It's my life."

This month, Morris' job description includes a doubly distinguished Portland performance. In addition to being part of his company's 25th anniversary tour, the performance also kicks off Portland's Month of Mozart.

When 11 local arts organizations arranged a celebration to mark the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth, White Bird invited Morris to present a

work set to Mozart. It seemed apropos, given that Morris has been called the Mozart of modern dance.

But surprisingly, there were no Mozart pieces in his current repertoire. So White Bird commissioned Morris to revive an older work called *Rondo*.

When Morris originally choreographed the solo, he danced it personally. For the Portland performance, *Rondo* will be performed by Amber Darragh, a dancer who grew up in Newport. Other than Darragh and Morris, only one other dancer has ever learned the piece.

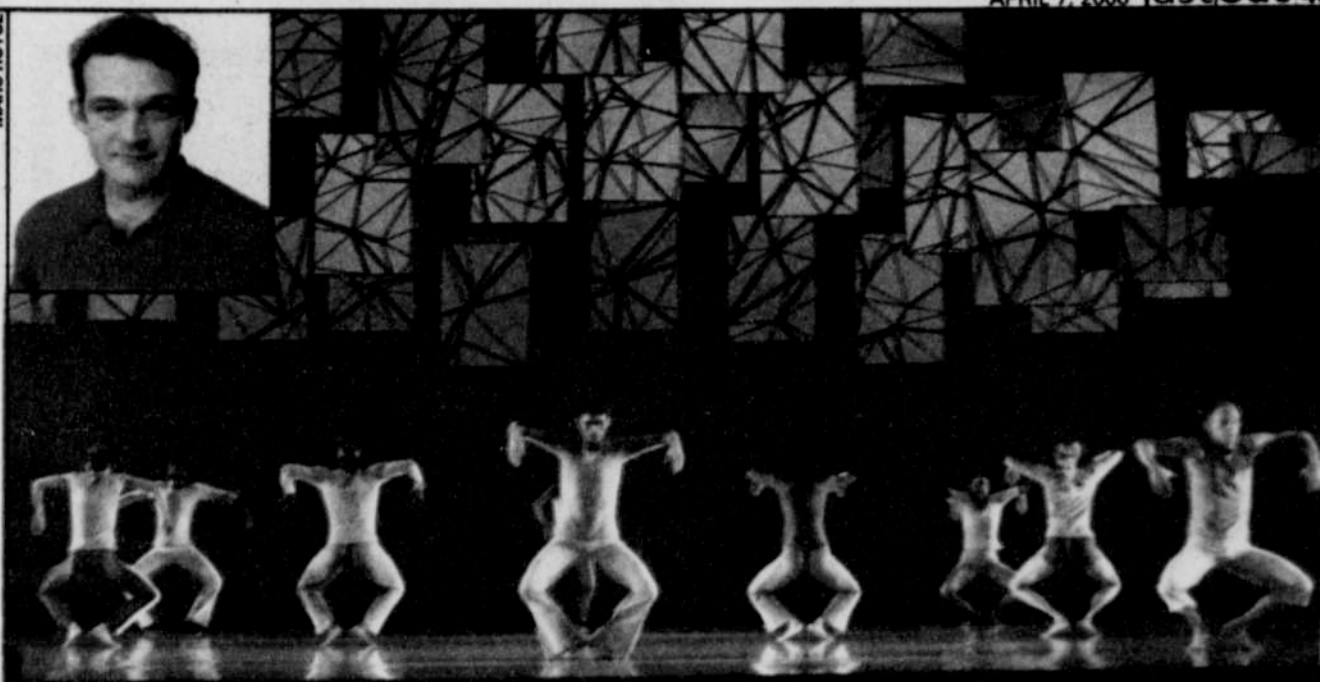
Though Darragh will perform *Rondo*, Portlanders will still be treated to watching Morris perform. He will dance *From Old Seville*, which he describes as "a little Spanish piece."

"Mark doesn't dance much anymore, and he is dancing on our program," says White Bird co-founder Walter Jaffe. "Whenever Mark dances, it's always fun to watch."

The program also includes *All Fours*, set to the music of Béla Bartók, and *V*, which is a 35-minute, full company piece set to a quintet by Robert Schumann. Though *V* is a relatively new work—it premiered in 2001—Jaffe says it is already considered a masterpiece.

The entire program features live music by the Mark Morris Dance Group Music Ensemble, which was formed in 1996 when the company made the commitment to perform only with live music.

"There's no reason to use a recording when you



Mark Morris (inset) is coming to town as part of his company's 25th anniversary tour and to kick off Portland's Month of Mozart.

have human beings," declares Morris. "Music is meant to be played live."

This dedication to live music goes hand in hand with Morris' innate musicality. Jaffe says Morris is considered one of today's most musical choreographers. And *Boston Globe* critic Richard Dyer once wrote that Morris, like Balanchine, "makes music visible."

Jaffe adds that Morris' choreography generally shows a great sense of humor and that audiences find his work accessible. "People always leave on a big high after they see his performances.... The overall experience is very positive and upbeat."

Once the 25th anniversary tour is finished, what will Morris do next? What are the goals of someone who is so well admired that he has been the subject of a biography and received honorary degrees from Juilliard and the Boston Conservatory of Music?

Morris has little interest in pontificating on past achievements. Likewise, he does not compare

his old work to his new. Instead, he says: "It changes as one changes. You don't make the same dance over and over again."

As for the future, Morris plans to keep "making up" dances. "I'm perfectly fine with what I'm doing, and I want to do more of it. I'm not looking to do something else." **10**

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP performs 7:30 p.m. April 19 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, 1037 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$19-\$43 from 503-790-2787.

Morris also joins White Bird co-founder Paul King and Gotham Building Tavern head chef Tommy Habetz for COOKING WITH THE CHOREOGRAPHERS. The culinary fund-raiser takes place 6:30 p.m. April 18 at 2240 N. Interstate Ave. Tickets are \$150.

Portland free-lance writer REBECCA RAGAIN enjoys both watching and writing about dance. Write her at rebeccaragain@yahoo.com.

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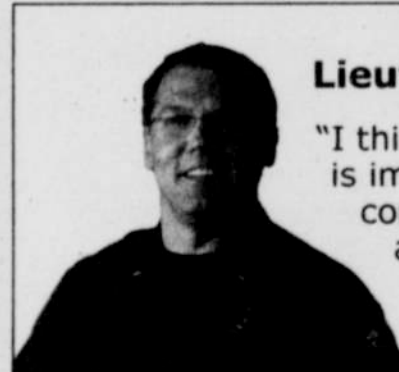
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