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## Cast your ballet for Morris

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Friday, October 29, 2004

Last weekend at UC-Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall, Mark Morris Dance Group presented two beautiful and brilliant works from the company's repertory — an experience in Morris' genius as a dancemaker. Morris accomplishes something few choreographers are capable of: He actually improves music. With a string quartet and a jazz band, Morris builds on the gorgeous scores, skillfully highlighting subtleties within the music.

The first piece, entitled "Mosaic & United," was a whirlwind of musical movement and color reminiscent of an advanced and intelligent version of "Fantasia."

The dancers' silken costumes and the softly lit orange-pink background set the atmosphere. Much of the movement suggested suspension or flight and subsequent release. One man stood on one leg, the other held hip-level in front of him, leaning very slightly forward and balanced by an assumed but unseen supporter in the wings until the support let go and he became grounded on the floor. Lifts portraying momentary, almost reverent stillness dissembled as quickly and gracefully as they formed. Some transitions within the piece occurred with a cyclonic running pattern that dancers joined and left between segments. In other instances, several dancers simply stood and gazed skyward in an inexplicably lovely moment.

One of the most engaging segments of "Mosaic & Unite" was a series of solos, memorable for the clever choreography of entrances and exits that made the dancers appear and vanish as if by magic. The choreography was basically identical for every dancer, but each soloist's exploration of space and interpretation of movement was so unique it could have been replicated by many more dancers without losing its freshness.

What was different each time was not a personality or some style, but a lens so finely unique that it was fascinating to figure out how the movement had changed each time. The piece finished with a rhythmic section in which Morris humorously incorporated a semi-disguised time-step, a basic of tap dance vocabulary, into his elegant work of art.

The second piece of the evening, "Violet Cavern," began with a darker theme, color scheme and even haunting music. Rectangles with webbed black lines resembling broken mirrors were suspended in the air, filling the top of the stage space. Dancers slithered upstage, lying on their backs and propelling themselves with their feet, zooming out and creating the illusion that the frame of the stage was expanding. Morris' witty choreography called for the dancers to lie flat on their backs, heads closest to the audience, culminating in a full body rolling exit to the sound of a drum roll.

This world on stage kept changing: Different moods of music coupled with corresponding colored lights established atmospheres such as graveyard gray and jamming red. What made this piece logical, manageable and pleasing to watch was Morris' method of building his movement. Each of several shapes or series of steps was introduced and then repeated in different places in the dance, such as a swipe of the hand over the face that is ballet mime for "die."

By the end, the audience had learned an entire new vocabulary of steps specific to this piece. The final sections incorporated and reinforced all this information. Many steps were presented together in an asymmetrical manner that was harmonious and familiar enough to make the effect complex but not overwhelming. It made perfect sense, and it was thrilling to be able to follow along and understand it.

Mark Morris Dance Group will be performing a different program, including a world premiere, at Zellerbach Hall in Berkeley through Oct. 30. For tickets, call (510)642-9988.

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