



Scene from dress rehearsal of Mark Morris' "Home."

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / PAT GREENHOUSE

## Morris' masterful mix of music and dance

By Christine Temin  
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**N**o choreographer since Balanchine has had as much faith in music as Mark Morris does, or used music with as much invention and skill, or demonstrated so convincingly that music and steps are all you need to make a great dance, that decor and narrative are often superfluous.

The music in last night's program – the first of two Morris' company is dancing in Boston during its annual visit – went from waltzes to country ballads by Michelle Shocked to a menacing Poulenc piece to Lou Harrison's

**Dance Review** crazy, exultant "Grand Duo." Morris declined to be decorous to the waltzes – clunky works just as well – and otherwise avoided the superficial while crafting choreography whose hallmarks are invention and inevitability.

Of the three Boston premieres, the oddest was "Sonata for MORRIS, Page 34

34

## 9:20 Morris' masterful mix

**■ MORRIS**  
Continued from Page 31

Clarinet and Piano," set to the eponymous Poulenc and played by Thomas Hill and Morris' I'll-try-anything pianist, Linda Dowdell. The choreography is a virtual graph of the music: The piano flinches and the dancers do, too. Melancholy and enigmatic at first, and filled with shifting geometry, "Sonata" ends up with what could be a brigade of busybody bunnies, hopping along. But that image is positively sober compared to some in "Canonic 3/4 Studies," the only work seen here before. (Concert Dance of Boston used to perform it.)

In this piece, Morris shows how a waltz can smack you in the face, causing you to keel over, and how it's just as useful for staggering as for swooning. He also shows himself a master of kinetic wit. The couple who can't bounce in sync; the guy who steers two women, occasionally sending them into reverse; these were moments met with hearty laughter.

"Home" is the flip side of "Appalachian Spring" - life on the prairie after the wedding. It's performed on a stripped stage - no wings, no backdrop, just bricks and plumbing. The brute lack of adornment is a metaphor for the hardscrabble farm Michelle Shocked describes in song. Schocked and bassist Rob Wasserman composed and played the score that alternated between laments - about widowhood, stillborn babies and the difficulty of getting the farm equipment folks to show up on time for the harvest - and vigorous pieces that prompted Morris to come up with clog dances. In the context of the despair of the women-alone-on-the-farm theme, the clog pieces read as essays in courage, as a determina-

**MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP**  
*Presented by Dance Umbrella at the Emerson Majestic Theatre last night. Program repeats through Saturday; the company performs a different program next week.*

tion to get on with life and transcend trouble through dancing that causes every muscle to twitch and shimmer with joy. Morris, who has a heavy folk dance background, performed in this work himself, as one of the six cloggers who present their art as plainly as possible, standing in a straight line facing us, because it doesn't need any gussying up.

Morris' company performed the "Polka" finale of "Grand Duo" here last year, and have now brought the whole four-movement work along. It's of the tribal rite genre, and very reminiscent of the pioneer era of modern dance, but without the cliches. Morris offers images of dancers clutching their pelvises, as if reveling in their potential as power centers, and pointing their fingers upward toward the light. Earth and heaven he gives us in these two basic movements. There are semaphore gestures all through the piece: arms that dispute, converse and take aim, and those pointing fingers that melt into a slyly sensuous curl.

All that goes before makes "Polka" make more sense than it did in isolation. The 14 dancers standing in a circle stomp, crouch and slap themselves into a frenzy as Dowdell and violinist Danielle Maddox egg them on with Harrison's manic score. In addition to having faith in music, Morris believes in his dancers, and they pay him back - with the kind of brilliant individuality-within-the-group they displayed last night.

**"DON'T MISS IT! A TOTAL TURN ON!"**