

'Mark Morris is the most gifted choreographer working today'

Filling the classical void

Mary Clarke

LOOKING at some of the once greatest classical ballet companies ever, we doubt the life force sustaining today's academic dance. Developed over centuries, brought to a technical brilliance unknown before in its history, it seems to be losing faith in its inheritance, while the loss of great choreographers in recent years has left a void where there should be a renaissance of creativity from a younger generation.

Yet great choreography is not the sole domain of classical ballet, and if the emphasis shifts now to a different and freer kind of movement (albeit with a classical base) that is, surely, an affirmation of the ability of dance to renew itself in a way which will reflect the values, beliefs, and behaviour of our time.

And nowhere is this shift of em-

phasis more apparent or more welcome than in the choreography of Mark Morris, which has dominated all dance activity at this year's Edinburgh Festival — as it did last year. Morris is the most gifted, most important, most truthful dance creator working today.

The first programme in Edinburgh brought delights. The second, in which virtually all the dances were new to this country, brought different and sometimes deeper ones. The simple, religious response Morris makes in *Back To Jesus, Meine Freude*, and to the text by Johann Franck, is yet another example of how he can translate music and words into dance. There's nothing sanctimonious about it, just a beautiful statement of belief in Jesus. And what joy to find the Morris troupe reunited with Edinburgh's Eric Ibler and Schola Cantorum who performed wonders in last year's *Dido And Aeneas*. And then, in total con-

trast, *Home*, to music composed and performed by Michelle Shocked and Rob Wasserman, in which American songs of sorrow are danced barefoot and contrasted with expertly timed and utterly cheerful sequences of step dancing — Morris himself leading the fun — until both styles are merged in the closing number.

Finally, *Grand Duo to Lou Harrison's Grand Duo for Violin and Piano* (James Clark and Linda Dowdell), of which we had seen the final circular Polka before, and which now emerged as a superbly crafted ritual suite of dances — serious, urgent, utterly compelling.

At the end of the evening, to rapturous applause, Morris comes out smiling, long curls streaming, to thank his audience, dancers and musicians. Long may he continue.

The last performance of Mark Morris Dance Group is at Meadowbank Hall tonight.