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Mark Morris Dance Group
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Past Meets Present: Mark Morris Dance Group Closes the 2009 American Dance Festival

A selection of five works, spanning two decades was presented by the Mark Morris Dance Group July 23 to 25 at the Durham Performing Arts Center to close performances at the 2009 American Dance Festival. While most of the work appeared stiff and formal compared to the rest of the work seen at ADF this season, it also served as a reminder of the unique interests and influences of Mark Morris.

Awash in shades of cerulean and white, the ten dancers in "A Lake," which first premiered in 1991, became ripples, tides, and waves, intricately woven through each other as they shifted forward and back. Set to Joseph Haydn's Horn Concerto No.2 in D, the movement of the dance matched perfectly the timber and quality of the music. Dancers whooshed relentlessly across the space in layers and groups. Eventually, grandiose, weight sharing duets soared up and over the space, touching down lightly like feathers falling from the sky. Reminiscent of early European court dance, the work boasted clean lines and simple patterns.

The curtain lifted on "Excursions," one of Morris' newer works choreographed in 2008, revealing a square shaft of light center stage in which six dancers stood in front of a red backdrop adorned with a strand of white lights, that created a smile across the it. Dressed in various shades of tan and brown with the odd bold color mixed in, the dancers re-enacted an abstract square dance, exchanging partners as they shimmied around the perimeter of the square. In their interactions with each other, they gestured wildly as if telling elaborate stories in a bar. The piece ended with a series of solos in the square, while the rest of the group marched like soldiers around its perimeter.

"Going Away Party," a "Texified" jaunt choreographed in 1990, arguably stole the show, punctuating the evening with a much needed exclamation point. While not the most original work in the concert, it provided entertainment and fun lacking in the other works. Predictably dressed in country-Western attire, the seven dancers do-si-doe to the songs of Bob Willis and his Texas Playboys. Lauren Grant, a particular standout for her sassy character and razor sharp technical skill, flirted and flounced all over her poor cowboy's heart. Moments of unnecessary raunchiness got in the way of the mostly cute and witty style of movement, but the work as a whole was a departure from Morris' typical choreographic severity.

Also presented in this concert were "Pecadillos" (2000), a solo performed by Joe Bowie and "Candleflowerdance" (2005), a sextet.

Ali Duffy MFA

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