

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mark Morris Dance Group Returns to Houston in January

Program Features Music Ranging from Bob Wills to Bach, Presented by Society for the Performing Arts

HOUSTON (Dec. 17, 2009) – Society for the Performing Arts (SPA), bringing the world's best to Houston, presents the return of **Mark Morris Dance Group** on Friday and Saturday, Jan. 15 and 16, at 8 p.m. in Wortham Center's Cullen Theater.

From its early years as, essentially, Mark Morris and a group of friends, to its contemporary status as a burgeoning dance institution, the Mark Morris Dance Group has stayed true to its founder's convictions, especially dancing with live music performed by some of the world's best musicians. *The New York Times* hails Mark Morris as "the most successful and influential choreographer alive."

Mark Morris Dance Group returns to Houston with a work that pays homage to Texas favorite Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys entitled *Going Away Party*. The ensemble will also perform *Excursions*, a piece for six dancers set to a piano score by Samuel Barber; the powerful *Italian Concerto*, a series of two duets and a solo dance with pianist Colin Fowler performing Bach's Italian Concerto in F Major; and *Grand Duo*, considered "one of the masterpieces of the late 20th century" (*The Guardian*), with music by Lou Harrison.

Morris's commitment to live music has led to collaborations with leading orchestras, opera companies and musicians including cellist Yo-Yo Ma in the Emmy Award-winning film *Falling Down Stairs* (1997); pianists Emanuel Ax and Yoko Nozaki for *Mozart Dances* (2006); and with the English National Opera in *Four Saints in Three Acts* (2000) and *King Arthur* (2006), among others.

The 53-year-old Morris was born in Seattle where he studied as a young man with Verla Flowers and Perry Brunson. In the early years of his career, he performed with Lar Lubovitch, Hannah Kahn, Laura Dean, Eliot Feld and the Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble. He formed the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1980, and has since created more than 120 works for the company. From 1988-1991, he was Director of Dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, the

national opera house of Belgium. Among the works created during his tenure were three evening-length dances: *The Hard Nut*; *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*; and *Dido and Aeneas*. In 1990, he founded the White Oak Dance Project with Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Morris is also much in demand as a ballet choreographer. He has created seven works on the San Francisco Ballet since 1994 and received commissions from American Ballet Theatre and the Boston Ballet, among others. His *Sandpaper Ballet* (1999) is currently in the repertory of Houston Ballet (to be performed May 27–June 6, 2010). He has worked extensively in opera, directing and choreographing productions for The Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, English National Opera and The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, among others.

Patrons are welcome to join the BMC Arts Talks! at 7 p.m. in the Wortham Center's Grand Foyer for a viewing of, and discussion regarding, a rare exhibition featuring portraits of Mark Morris by such notable photographers as Annie Leibovitz, Max Vadukul, Klaus Lucka and Mark Seliger, led by exhibit curator Alexandro Pacheco. Patrons are also welcome to attend the H-E-B Performance Prelude at 7:30 p.m. in the Wortham Center's Grand Foyer by Dance Ad Deum (Friday, Jan. 15) and City Dance Ensemble (Saturday, Jan. 16). There will be a Q&A with company members following the performance on Saturday, Jan. 16.

Part of SPA's IW Marks Dance Series, this event is generously sponsored by Humphreys Foundation, Continental Airlines, H-E-B, The Brown Hand Center and BMC Software.

Tickets range from \$20-\$55 and can be purchased online at www.spahouston.org, by phone at 713-227-4SPA or at the courtyard level ticket office at Jones Hall located at 615 Louisiana St. Hours of operation: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. Monday – Friday, and 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Saturday. For groups of 15 or more, call 713-632-8113.

Beyond the Stage

Mark Morris: Portraits

Through January 13

Devon Energy Tower, Two Allen Center
1200 Smith St.

Mark Morris at the Menil: A Conversation with Stanton Welch

7:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 14

The Menil Collection, 1515 Sul Ross

FREE and open to the public. Limited seating available.

About Society for the Performing Arts

Founded in 1966, Society for the Performing Arts (SPA) is the largest independent non-profit presenting organization in the Southwest. Since its inception, SPA has sponsored more than 800 performances of the world's finest music, dance and theater events, in adherence to the belief that the arts are fundamental to the overall enrichment and quality of life within the community. In addition to presenting artists, SPA seeks to provide a variety of learning experiences for adults and children through master classes, lectures and special student performances, as well as build relationships between the performing arts and other interests within the greater Houston area and throughout the state of Texas.