

# Unusual themes to dance program

By Sharon Basco

**CHOREOGRAPHER** Mark Morris focuses on wrestling, striptease, soap powders and detergents at the Northeastern University Alumni Hall, tomorrow through Saturday in an evening-long program titled "Mythologies."

He is not being silly or provocative. Not entirely, anyhow. After Sankai Juku (the band of Japanese Butoh artists who suspend themselves nude, upside down, with their bodies chalked in white), nobody is dumb enough to try shocking us.

This is not, after all, the same Boston that hooted a thinly clad Isadora Duncan off the stage half a century ago. This is a Boston where Eiko and Koma recently danced nude night after night at Boston Shakespeare Theater without a whimper of protest.

And when the Jukuites suspended their muscular bodies outdoors in broad daylight last year, even the police were fascinated.

So when Mark Morris, who promotes his homosexual lifestyle along with his highly successful art, tells us about "Striptease," a dance where "seven or eight of us will end up nude," we aren't worried for him.

"I researched 'Striptease' last year in the Combat Zone," said Morris in a recent telephone conversation. The 29-year-old dancer and choreographer, who was here recently to perform with the Concert Dance Company and the Boston Ballet, went back to the Zone

for more research a few weeks ago. "After ballet class I went to the Naked I again and watched Princess Cheyenne do an incredibly great act. I sent a note back to her and didn't know what to expect, but she came right out and talked for a long time. She's great."

Why is a choreographer who generally hones in on issues of philosophical and poetic importance so entranced with a stripper?

Blame it on French literary critic Roland Barthes. His collection of essays, written between 1954 and 1956, and collected into a thin volume entitled "Mythologies," inspired Morris.

This young dance-maker, who goes in for novels by Iris Murdoch and "Dynasty"-style TV, says the Barthes book is "... not the kind of thing I usually read, but I like these particular pieces a lot, and they seem to generate dances."

Reading through the 28 essays in "Mythologies," Morris was not taken with subjects such as "The Brain of Einstein," "Wine and Milk," or "The Jet-Man." He chose three short pieces: "The World of Wrestling," "Soap powders and Detergents" and "Striptease." And of these Morris will make his evening of dance.

One part of the trilogy was shown in New York last year. "It's easy for me to talk about 'Wrestling,'" Morris said, "because it's finished and I know what it's like. I always work on dances until the last minute, so I really won't have the definitive word on the other two until they're performed.



**DIFFERENT DANCE:** Choreographer Mark Morris brings 'Mythologies' to Boston this weekend.

Staff photo by Michael Fein

"'Wrestling' is a big piece for 10 people," Morris said. "I designed it by making up wrestling studies ... things that looked like wrestling, but weren't. Then I changed the time and space and combination of people in them until I got what I wanted, which is — let's see — it's *wrestling*. You know, it's a ... it's a ... a spectacle."

For a choreographer to focus

on a sport where "everything is presented exhaustively" must appeal to Morris, whose work at its best attains the full dimension of its theme.

"All three pieces are spectacles," Morris said. "Of the three, 'Soap' is the most abstract. I'm working on the qualities of cleansing, sort of. And the music — by Herschel Garfein — extolls the virtues of various products. I'm

doing it Busby Berkeley-style, like movie dances, and I'm using a lot of cinematic techniques ... trying to make 10 dancers look like 100."

The score may be more important for the "Soap-powders and Detergents" section of "Mythologies" than for the other two parts. Can Morris develop "the washerwoman's movements when she beats the clothes," about whom Barthes writes, or "the housewife pressing and rolling the washing against a sloping board" without boring his audience?

Chances are, he will give the composer free reign here, depending on the overstatement and repetition of advertising language to supplement more subtly developed movement.

"Striptease" may be something else entirely. Here Morris will have the challenge of delivering Barthes' message without, as Morris himself puts it, "... falling into something quite as literal as what Princess Cheyenne does," he said. "I mean, this *is* a concert version!"

"Look, this is a large-scale thing," Morris said, "with lots of music, lots of dancers, sort of a big theater, and the subjects are big ones. And it's not just the three subjects I'm working with, but how they are perceived, what they mean. You know: the good and evil aspects of wrestling, the good and evil aspects of detergents and striptease, the extremes of what those phenomena mean. This concert will be about the viewers too. It's a projected thing, 'Mythologies,' because it's based on subjects that are public, things that you've known about and have thoughts about before you come in and see what Barthes or I say about them."