

The New Criterion

Dance

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Cold pastoral

by [Laura Jacobs](#)

On Mark Morris's San Francisco production of the ballet "Sylvia."

No choreographer working today has been more blessed than Mark Morris. He was championed right from the start by the most powerful dance critic of the 1980s, Arlene Croce, who then passed the pompoms to her coterie of younger critics—pompoms that still jump and flutter. He was raised up into establishment stardom, with all its grants and gigs and interviews, while maintaining an anti-establishment posture that flattered everyone involved. I imagine other young choreographers looked on in shock and awe as the money, the management, went flowingly to Mark. He wasn't gracious about it, either. Read interviews along the way and you'll find dueling impulses at play—complaint and braggadocio. Clueless directors, competitive colleagues, humorless critics (the very people who greased his path), even the “straightness” of the pas de deux—all flies in his soup. But oh the delight he brings to audiences: “They ...

Laura Jacobs's *Landscape with Moving Figures* is available from Dance & Movement Press.

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