Mark Morris Dance Group: L’Allegro, Il Penseroso ed il Moderato on THIRTEEN’S Great Performances

Friday, March 27 at 9 p.m. on PBS

Mark Morris’s signature work comes to television for the first time, hosted by Mikhail Baryshnikov

Merriment and Milton are hardly synonymous, but the poet who penned Paradise Lost also inspired George Frideric Handel’s L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato, which concludes “Mirth, with thee we mean to live.” Choreographer Mark Morris garnered international fame for this piece, considered a landmark achievement, and set to Handel’s Baroque masterpiece, in which a colorful array of dancers embody the ecstasy of art that transforms.

Mark Morris Dance Group: L’Allegro, Il Penseroso ed il Moderato – hosted by Mikhail Baryshnikov – airs on THIRTEEN’S Great Performances Friday, March 27, 2015 at 9 p.m. on PBS. (Check local listings.)
In discussing the work, Baryshnikov has admired “the way they perform it – with pride for humankind. There’s restraint and dignity and satisfaction and pride. But at the same time there is an unspoken camaraderie; hands touching, running, and they suddenly become one and disappear like nothing has happened onstage.”

The performance was filmed July 2014 at the Teatro Real in Madrid, Spain.

L’Allegro was Mark Morris’s premiere work as Director of Dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, Belgium on November 23, 1988, and in the intervening years, has been performed to critical and audience acclaim all over the world. Winner of numerous awards including a Laurence Olivier Award, “L’Allegro” uses Milton’s text (sung in English and performed without super titles) and features sets inspired by William Blake’s later watercolors.

“It is Mr. Morris’s great achievement to have further intensified the composer’s eloquence by expressing his lyric energy in powerfully expressive bodily movement, and, moreover, to have done so with such naturalness that the music sounds as though the composer had intended it to be danced from the beginning,” observed The Wall Street Journal.

And reviewing a recent New York revival of the work, Alastair Macauley of The New York Times marveled, “It seemed a masterpiece in its opening season; 25 years on, it is also a classic.”

Founded in New York City in 1980 by Morris, the Mark Morris Dance Group (MMDG) is considered one of the preeminent modern dance companies, its members praised repeatedly for their technique and their musicality. Live music and community engagement are vital components of the Dance Group, which has toured with its own musicians, the MMDG Music Ensemble, since 1996. Through Access/MMDG programming, the Dance Group provides educational opportunities in dance and music to people of all ages and abilities while on tour internationally and at home at the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn, NY.


A production of THIRTEEN Productions LLC for WNET, Teatro Real, Bel Air Media and the Mark Morris Dance Group in association with TVE, Mark Morris Dance Group: L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato is directed for television by Vincent Bataillon and produced by François Duplat, John Walker and Joan Hershey. For Great Performances, Bill O’Donnell is series producer and David Horn is executive producer.

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