

## The Daily Californian

[Dance: Classical Rhythms, And All That Jazz](#)

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COURTESY/CAL PERFORMANCES

THE MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP performs their dance piece ♦'Violet Cavern.' The piece enjoyed its West Coast premiere last Friday at Zellerbach.

Dance performances at theaters around the world often cling to an age-old tradition: ballerinas twirling onstage to prerecorded Chopin or Mozart.

However, Zellerbach Auditorium just happens to be in the People's Republic of Berkeley, where nothing is conventional. This was quite clear on Saturday night as the Mark Morris Dance Group walked, ran, and leapt to live music played by a classical quartet and jazz trio in the orchestra pit. To describe their performance as unique and different would be a blatant understatement; these dancers set themselves apart within the dance world in more ways than one.

"Mosaic & United," their first piece, is just that: a mix of different steps and brightly colored costumes joined together by lively classical pieces from the Mark Morris Dance Group Music Ensemble. The company's distinctive style of movement is showcased in this dance. Morris' steps seem to blend ballet, modern dance, tai chi, African tribal dance, Indian dance, Irish jigs and body building calisthenics into a performance unlike any other.

The combination of so many styles gives the movement a somewhat disjointed appearance—steps do not flow smoothly from one to the next, which the typical theatergoer, accustomed to the fluid lines of ballet, may have the potential to strongly dislike.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of "Mosaic & United" is the repetition of movements in different positions—an entire set of steps is done in one direction and then immediately repeated at a different angle. While the steps remain the same, the act of seeing them performed in a new direction allows the viewer to notice movements that might otherwise be missed when the steps are only done once in one direction.

After a brief intermission, the West Coast premiere of "Violet Cavern" was presented. The more structured and refined of the two pieces, it began with the dancers lying on stage, unmoving and awash in bright purple lighting. As jazz trio The Bad Plus began to play, this quiet setting slowly transformed into a vibrant

scene of movement that matched the music note for note, as if the dancers themselves produced the music as they moved. The auditorium was quickly transformed into a nightclub as the bass player's notes echoing from the speakers and the dancers move flawlessly with every note.

Simplicity is truly the key within this dance-every single person is dressed in a variety of black and white exercise clothes rather than the usual elaborate costumes. This choice of attire serves an excellent purpose within the piece-as the lighting changes from purple to red to countless other colors, the dancers themselves actually change as well.

The lights color them as they move, giving each dance a different feeling. Rushed, energetic steps are orange, which quickly change into slow, languid blue movements. While the constant color change might appear to be distracting to the average viewer, it is synchronized perfectly with the music and dance, further enhancing the overall aesthetic experience of the piece.

"Violet Cavern" is interesting in its use of movement to examine human relationships. In one section, male and female dancers are paired together all over the stage. Some hold each other, others knock each other down and many of them lift their partner up off the stage floor. As the music plays, the couples repeat this order of movements: loving, fighting, and reconciling.

It is not limited to the notion of male dominance-many female dancers lift men up and throw them to the ground. This shows just how powerful of a medium dance can be. Illustrating humanity without words is challenging, but this group does it, as well as everything else, with grace and style.

Bend color, shape and rhythm with Corey at [arts@dailyca.org](mailto:arts@dailyca.org).