

Sarah Haarmann

BY MARINA HARSS

Sarah Haarmann stands out without trying to. There is a precision and lack of affectation in her dancing that is very Merce Cunningham. Her movement quality is sharp and clear; her stage presence utterly focused. It's no wonder she caught Mark Morris' eye. Even though she still considers herself "very much the new girl" at Mark Morris Dance Group (she became a full-time member in August 2017), in a recent performance of *Layla and Majnun*, Haarmann seemed completely in her element.

Company: Mark Morris Dance Group

Age: 27

Hometown: Macungie, Pennsylvania

Training: Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Performing Arts and Marymount Manhattan College

Turning point: After studying at dance studios in her hometown, Haarmann auditioned for a performing arts high school in nearby Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. "That totally changed the game for me. I realized this was something I wanted to do forever," she says. "I took ballet and modern, composition, dance history, improvisation. And I choreographed there too. And it was free."

Becoming part of the company: "First they hire you as an apprentice and see how it goes and then, after six months, you have a meeting with Mark. He really invests in people, so he wanted to know whether this was something I could see myself doing for a while. It was intimidating at first, but in the end he said, 'You're great. I'm hiring you.'"

Before Morris: Haarmann danced with choreographer Pam Tanowitz, and she took part in several workshops held by the Merce Cunningham Trust. "I got hooked, taking class there. The technique is so good for you, and the workshops are brilliant."

A new life: Getting into a company like MMDG "is life-changing," says Haarmann. "I have health insurance. I have a dressing room. I don't have to schlep all my stuff around the city. Before, I couldn't afford anything. Now I have a life."

Working with the boss: Shortly after she joined,

"Sarah is imaginative, flexible, unmannered, portable and fun."

—MARK MORRIS

Morris created *Pepperland*, a dance inspired by the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. (See page 20.) The creation process "was fun at times, and hard at other times. He created it so quickly. One of the biggest things that astonishes me is how fast he is. You have to be really present all the time."

Challenges: Morris is famously musical, and expects his dancers to be too. "That's been one of my biggest learning curves," says Haarmann. "This idea of being completely in sync with the music is new for me."

Free time: "I'm a big reader. Right now, I'm reading two essays by James Baldwin. It's amazing how what he was writing in the sixties rings true even today."

What Morris is saying: "I first saw Sarah dance, expertly, in a performance of Pam Tanowitz's company. Pam's work is very specific and meticulous and hard to do well. So is mine. Sarah is more planes than curves. We are still new to each other, and I like having her around every day." ■

Haarmann performing Pam Tanowitz's *Dance at Joyce Kilmer*