

Second Annual Festival Of Contemporary Scores

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New York

Columbia University's second annual Festival of Contemporary American Music took place last week end. Like the first a year ago, it was a noble effort to further the hearing and recognition of musical activity of today. The festival provides the outlet that American music has needed in this city for a long time.

This year's programs broadened the scope of the festival by the inclusion of an evening of ballet, an evening devoted to the works of a single composer, and a program concerned with music for high schools. Such a plan of necessity omitted any extensive consideration of chamber music, though it included a new chamber opera.

The festival opened with the dance program of Martha Graham and her company on May 10, continued with an orchestral concert by the NBC Symphony conducted by Leon Barzin, and a program of music by Charles Ives in the afternoon and evening of May 11, a program of music for high schools on May 12, and closed with a repetition of Gian-Carlo Menotti's "The Medium" on May 13.

The Martha Graham program consisted of "Appalachian Spring," the Pulitzer Prize score of Aaron Copland, and the premiere of "Serpent's Heart," commissioned by the Alice M. Ditson Fund from Samuel Barber for Martha Graham. The new ballet seeks an analogy with the Jason and Medea myth, expounding the story of possessive love which seeks revenge when scorned. The work is conceived along the lines of Greek tragedy. There are four characters: One Like Medea (Martha Graham); One Like Jason (Erick Hawkins); Daughter of the King (Yuriko), and The Chorus (May O'Donnell).

Samuel Barber's music is skillful in its rhythms and its orchestration, but on first hearing appears to serve more as a background to the story than as an integral part of the work. It conveys emotional crises more in a descriptive than in a participating sense. The Graham choreography is as stereotyped as its individualistic style allows. The costumes of Edythe Gilfond are pictorially striking.