

ON THE AISLE

By Claudia Cassidy

Martha Graham and Aaron Copland Good Companions in Superb "Appalachian Spring"

Martha Graham's return after five too many years away sharply defined at least two impressions—that her work as choreographer has a new and concentrated resonance, and that every dance deserves the birthright, or at least the sustenance, of a good score. The lovely, lyrical outpouring of Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring" is the very source of the only new work Miss Graham presented at the Civic Opera house yesterday afternoon. It was as much a part of the performance as the sap is part of the living tree.

The dance is another authentic piece of Graham Americana. In Pennsylvania a man and woman are building a house and into it go the dreams, the courage, the stalwart pride and the loneliness of pioneers, the help of neighbors and the hell-fire and damnation exhortation of the revivalist invariably lured by the receding horizon. Miss Graham is the bride, Erick Hawkins the husband, Merce Cunningham of the flying coattails the revivalist. May O'Donnell is the symbol of pioneer women, and four little girls form a kind of chorus. Against the merest indication of the house, they perform a dance that is both ritual and reality, a dance rich in imaginative invention, gracious in design, cumulative in emotional impact. At the close, when husband and wife take possession of their dwelling, there

is a gentle yet royal dignity about the gesture. This man's house is his castle, his wife is its queen.

Miss Graham is a listening dancer, and Mr. Copland has the sound of distance in his music. They make good companions. Her own performance is magnificent in characterization, eloquent in realization. Mr. Hawkins, a rawboned Yankee of a dancer, has the courtliness of disciplined strength. The best way I can describe Mr. Cunningham is to say that if he were a race horse I would bet on him every time just for the spring in his walk that threatens momentarily to fly.

But neither "Letter to the World," for all its surges of beauty and its understanding of complexity, nor "Every Soul Is a Circus," for all its twitches of satirical glee, carried such concentrated conviction. The music of the former lies in Emily Dickinson's poetry, not in Hunter Johnson's arid score, and I missed Jane Dudley as the ancestress. The work as a whole was not quite in its best estate yesterday, tho Mr. Cunningham's March wind had a special likeness to St. Patrick's day in the morning. And the circus satire of a showoff female seemed episodic and a bit dull. Miss Graham has gone past it, and I am glad her April 14 return is devoted entirely to her new repertory. If "Appalachian Spring" is a sample, she has been striding the creative winds in seven league boots.