

GRAHAM DANCERS IN HARVARD EVENT

Give World Premiere of 'Night Journey' to End 'Symposium on Music Criticism'

By JOHN MARTIN

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BOSTON, May 4—As the final event in a three-day "Symposium on Music Criticism," under the auspices of the Department of Music of Harvard University, Martha Graham and her company gave the world premiere here last evening of a dance work entitled "Night Journey," in the auditorium of the Cambridge High and Latin School.

The music by William Schuman was especially commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, which also made possible Miss Graham's appearance in the symposium. The setting is by Isamu Noguchi, who has done many of the Graham settings.

This is the third recent work added to the repertory on a classical Greek theme, this time that of Oedipus and Jocasta. According to the program note, "the action takes place in Jocasta's heart at the instant when she recognizes the ultimate terms of her destiny." The only major figures are Jocasta and Oedipus, and there is a chorus of six women led by a seer.

Effective Moments

It is not one of Miss Graham's more inspired works, though it has its effective moments. With so familiar a theme it is essential, for us perhaps even more than for the ancient Greek audience, that there be something revelatory, some particular emotional evocation, to justify the retelling. This is not forthcoming in the present work, which leaves us substantially where it finds us.

The most interesting passage comes toward the end of a long scene between the two principal figures, in which Jocasta is alternately the mother and the wife of Oedipus. The work would profit enormously if this were developed at greater length. That it is a delicate theme to treat in terms of dance goes without saying; more the dramatist can talk about it more circumspectly than the choreographer can visualize it. Nevertheless, it is the core of the situation and our sympathy with Jocasta's "instant of agony" depends on our specific emotional awareness of it.

Mr. Schuman's music is dark and portentous. As in his only previous score for the dance, that for Antony Tudor's "Undertow," he relies for his dramatic effect largely upon persistence and iteration, which direct their attack upon the nerves. It is a substantial score, however, and a completely appropriate one.

Noguchi's Set

Because the stage of the auditorium is highly unsatisfactory for theatrical presentation, judgment must be reserved, at least in part, upon Mr. Noguchi's set. On this occasion it did not appear to rank with his best. Though it was good to see him break away from the arrangement of elements which he has recently used rather repetitiously, some of the detail, especially that of the highly stylized bed in Jocasta's chamber, seemed over-designed and distracting.

Besides Miss Graham as Jocasta the cast consisted of Erick Hawkins as Oedipus, Mark Ryder as the Seer, and Pearl Lang, Yuriko, Ethel Winter, Helen McGehee, Nantanya Neumann and Joan Skinner as the chorus.

The program also included "Dark Meadow," with music by Carlos Chavez and décor by Mr. Noguchi. A large and distinguished audience greeted the performance with rapt attention and enthusiastic applause.