

"Dance."

Feb. 1941.

MARTHA GRAHAM & GROUP. Jan. 20,
Mansfield Theatre, New York.

Before a crowd that jam-packed the Mansfield Theatre, Martha Graham made her first Broadway appearance of the current season, unveiling two works new to New York—"Letter to the World" and "El Penitente"—and filling out the program with her tragi-comic "Every Soul is a Circus."

Originally presented as an experimental piece at the Bennington Festival last summer, "Letter to the World" is a dance fantasy based on the poetry and vivid personality of Emily Dickinson. While Jean Erdman speaks the lines which reveal the poetess to the world, Miss Graham lays bare the restless and tortured Dickinson soul through gesture and dance movement. A dance-revelation of the poet's secret self, it carries along in dramatic style, but frequently the work sags, scenes run overlong and the sense of the unreal is lost. With proper paring, "Letter to the World" might be made a major contribution to pure American dance-art. Miss Graham's entire group is used in support.

The second premiere offered caught Miss Graham in one of her mystic moods, concerned with certain ritualistic practices of the Penitentes, a sect found in the Southwest. "El Penitente" is a Grahamized version of that sect's Crucifixion celebration which members dance each season. The work is monotonous and unpalatable despite some fine dancing by Miss Graham, Merce Cunningham and Erick Hawkins, who appears as the self-flagellating Penitent.

Miss Graham's popular satire, "Every Soul is a Circus," concluded the program. Semi-tragic in places, yet richly humorous throughout, it depicts a silly woman who is constantly frustrated in her efforts to hold the spotlight in her particular world. Fate, the ringmaster, thwarts her at every turn, occasioning frequent chuckles and guffaws.

—V. B.