

THORNG WELCOMES MARTHA GRAHAM

'Punch and the Judy' Is Novelty
Marking Dancer's Initial
Appearance of Season

STAR LAUDED AS COMEDIAN

Erick Hawkins in Role of
Punch, Merce Cunningham
Appears as Pegasus

By JOHN MARTIN

The newly named Concert Theatre in West Fifty-eighth Street last night played host to Martha Graham in her first appearance of the season, and an audience of typical Graham size made the walls fairly bulge.

The novelty of the evening was the work which Miss Graham created last Summer for the Bennington Festival and which answers to the name of "Punch and The Judy." After seeing it, it is easy to understand why this Judy requires a capital T, for she is quite a girl. She is, indeed, all wives who have recalcitrant husbands, which is to say, all wives. As the text, neatly snipped out of Gordon Craig's "Tom Fool" prologues, aptly states the theme, it is "squabble and scuffle." Beyond this there is no specific relation to the traditional Punch and Judy show that used to delight the children in the days before progressive education, though, truth to tell, it is the same kind of delicious rough-and-tumble from beginning to end, with great wisdom under its gay exterior and a wonderful originality of expression.

An Unsolvable Problem

Besides the husband and wife, there are a brattish daughter who is a chip off both old blocks, an innocent-faced siren called Pretty Polly, three heroes representing the idealistic callings of soldier, Indian scout and two-gun highwayman; Pegasus, who is the symbol of escape, and a chorus of three busybodies who are the Fates. But not even this combination of transcendental and material figures can solve the wife's perennial problem of how to be happy though married, and at the end we are just exactly where we started, of course.

The performance is exemplary. Miss Graham is as adept a comedian and as great a master of timing as you are likely to find anywhere around, and the movement she has created for herself is convulsingly eloquent. Erick Hawkins as Punch is also absolutely first-rate, the complete picture of boisterous extroversion, with a wealth of comment behind his

characterization. The chorus is beautifully done by Jean Erdman, Jane Dudley and Ethel Butler; Nina Fonaroff is excellent as the child, and Merce Cunningham is an attractive Pegasus.

Robert McBride's music is genial and lively, Arch Lauterer has designed a little setting that is a gem and Charlotte Trobridge's costumes are full of style and color.

"El Penitente" Opens Program

The program opened with "El Penitente" in a performance that did not really get going until along about the middle, what with the seating of late-comers and the like to contend with. It is an admirable composition, nevertheless, and the closing episodes were played as finely as they deserve to be.

"Letter to the World," though no longer a novelty, is bound to dominate any program of which it is part. It will bear endless re-seeing, not only for the new detail that emerges each time, but also for the sheer beauty of the thing as a whole. Here is wisdom of another sort, nor does it all lie in the poems of Emily Dickinson on which it is based. Upon the unwritten theme of these lovely verses Miss Graham has built a memorable work, richly mature in its point of view and warmed with the glow of deep human understanding. Miss Erdman, Miss Dudley and Mr. Cunningham again gave fine support to the tremendously moving performance by Miss Graham herself.

The indispensable Louis Horst was the assisting pianist. A second performance will be given tonight, with "Every Soul Is a Circus" substituted for "Punch and The Judy."

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