

Graham Offers New Dances



an *Bendheim* vs

MARTHA GRAHAM

By HENRY PLEASANTS

THE program given by Martha Graham and her Company for the Forum in the Academy of Music disclosed a remarkable change in Miss Graham's creative style.

All the compositions were new to Philadelphia, and relatively recent additions to the Graham repertoire. Reserving specific discussion for later, it may be observed that much of the earnest rigidity that heretofore has characterized her dance compositions is gone. Interpretively she seems to have relaxed. There is flexibility now, and even humor.

The evening began with a work called "The Penitent," a sort of stylization of the ritual dances of the Mexican Penitentes. It had, as all Miss Graham's dances have, a fine sense of form and much invention; also a lyricism rather new in her work. But it was not effective theater. It achieved a primitive character to the extent that the feeling of stylization was gone, leaving the spectator with a sense of having intruded upon something not intended as a spectacle.

This was followed by the program's most extensive and most impressive composition, "Letter to the World," based on the life and poems of Emily Dickinson. This dance is remarkable for its sensitive approach to biography and for the ingenious way Miss Graham has evolved a new form to suit that approach.

Her premise seems to have been that a personal subject, such as Emily Dickinson, can better be studied through her creative work than through the factual life record. Consequently she has built her composition more or less impressionistically out of quotations from Miss Dickinson's poems, spoken by a dancing member of the cast.

The result is a remarkably pene-

trating picture of Emily Dickinson's emotional life as it developed in relation to herself and her environment and the events of her life. It is, however, too long. An hour of abstractions of Emily Dickinson, however artistically conceived and executed, is about 20 minutes too many.

The program closed with a satiric comedy dance called "Punch and the Judy," a commentary upon the relations of man and woman. Miss Graham's comedy tends toward the ponderous side, and the scenario of "Punch and the Judy" is not as articulate as a comedy should be.

But it was nice to see Miss Graham having fun. Time was when modern dancers, and Miss Graham in particular, never cracked a smile. They were eternally preoccupied with the grim aspects of life. Now the trend seems to be towards relaxation. It is a healthy sign.

Phil. S. 1942. "Record."

Philadelphia (Pa.)
"Bulletin."

There are a few exceptions to admit like things

Musical Council