

Martha Graham's Recital

Two New Works Presented, Group Composition and Solo

By Margaret Lloyd

New York

The Forty-Sixth Street Theater was completely sold out for Martha Graham's first Broadway concert in two seasons, Sunday night. The audience assembled came mainly from the world of art and so was conversant with mental imagery in tone and color, rhythm and line, and movement. And it must be admitted that the two new works offered required such a creative and responsive audience.

Not for the general public is the highly concentrated potion called "Deaths and Entrances," the larger group work, nor for that matter the only less concentrated solo, "Salem Shore." Even to those who knew the language, it was felt that the experience would be incomplete until the works were seen again. Fortunately the program is to be repeated on the evening of Jan. 9.

"Deaths and Entrances," which takes its title from a poem by Dylan Thomas, is baffling, ensnaring and all but shattering in its effect. But what it is about is the spectator's private affair. The cue is given in a brief program note and from there each must enter the mystic realm alone.

In an atmosphere of gloom, vaguely intimating the Brontës' bleak house on the moors, against the thrust of forms and objects, the bewildering action unfolds. It takes place in the secret land of hopes and fears, dreams and desires, and memories.

Three sisters, indirectly posited on the Brontë sisters, live together in considerable disharmony, according to their occasional motions of petulance and irritation; and of these Miss Graham, looking radiantly beautiful and otherworldly in a black gown, is the protagonist. "A shell, a glass goblet, a vase," bring to her the rush of memories that largely constitutes the action.

She has a mad scene that has probably never been equalled by the greatest of Ophelias. It is so terrific it is almost repellent. She uses movements in the chest and shoulders, sharp sudden accents in the torso, strange steps and vibrations, that have never been thought of before. It is all the more

alarming because it is so restrained and still and absolutely without melodrama.

There are troubled love scenes that seem to end in frustration. One never knows whether it is "the poetic beloved" (Merce Cunningham) or "the dark beloved" (Erick Hawkins) that is closer, but one gropingly gathers that it is the latter if only because his black jerkin ties in with her black gown. The rivals have a duo-dance of contest, and with two others, "the cavaliers," a wonderful quartet of strong, masculine movement. Jane Dudley, as one of the sisters, dances marvelously. Sophie Maslow is less compellingly the third sister.

There are lighter scenes, as when the three sisters in childhood are remembered (danced by Ethel

Butler, Nina Fonaroff, and Pearl Lang); and at the end when there seems to be an opening of vision toward brighter views.

The music by Hunter Johnson, played by a small orchestra consisting of woodwinds, French horn, bass viol, piano and drums, as far as one could judge, is of a piercing, haunting, tempestuous quality, like Arch Lauterer's forms and objects, entering into the stress and strain of emotional event.

Mr. Lauterer's architectural forms also play an intrinsic part in the solo, "Salem Shore," "a ballad of a woman's longing for her beloved's return from the sea." One piece suggests the "widow's walk" found on old Salem houses, another a fragment of a ship's prow, and the vacant cyclorama denotes the cruel expanse of sea beyond. In other objects, as in the black lace parasol, memory again seems to be involved. But the solo was hardly more clear in detail than the major work, and Miss Gra-

ham gave herself the difficult assignment of opening cold with it.

Lines of verse spoken from the wings by Georgia Sargeant, and presumably important, were but faintly heard. The score, by Paul Nordoff, used familiar themes now and again. The costumes for both

works were designed by Edythe Gilfond. Louis Horst conducted the orchestral ensemble, and Jean Rosenthal was in charge of the lighting.

After all this, the comedy, "Punch and The Judy," which ordinarily would have been welcomed, seemed more or less in the way. One would so much rather have seen the new works directly over again; though as a matter of endurance for both Miss Graham and her public that would have been impossible.

"Punch and The Judy" has been revised, and not for the better, in this writer's estimation; except that Robert McBride's score was played for the first time in an orchestral arrangement. The setting lost compactness against the many-hued draperies designed no doubt to cover the backdrop for the theater's current production, "Rosalinda." There are omissions and replacements in the action which leave one longing for the fresh and startling little comedy just as it was in the first place.