

Martha Graham and Company Open Week of Repertory at National

By Harriett Johnson

Giving your imagination a good work-out is one pleasure of a Martha Graham dance recital. Her program last night at the National Theatre which opened a week of repertory for her and her company found the ensemble in excellent form and as stimulating as on previous occasions.

"I don't always understand her symbols, but she's exciting," was one layman's comment. You'll find no conventional ballet patterns, no stylized gestures, no pleasant terpsichorian figures a la Sylphides on Miss Graham's programs. For many years this distinguished artist has been a pioneer—an innovator in exploring untried and wider horizons of expression in the dance. She makes dance gestures and movements dramatic without trite literal descriptions or resorting to familiar formulas.

'El Penitente'

Her subjects are frequently not the kind you'd choose to enjoy for an evening's relaxation after a hard day at the office. "El Penitente," for example, with which she began her program last night, describes the life of the Penitentes," a sect congregating in and around Mexico. They believe "in purification from sin through severe penance." Erick Hawkins as the Penitent whips himself; and Miss Graham as the "Mary Figure" carries the Death Cart as the symbol for sin. The number closes more jocosely however, with a festival dance which has no ritualistic significance.

As a study in symbolistic expression and delineation of mood through fluid body movement,

Miss Graham's company is exciting to observe and contemplate. Her dancers are expertly trained and have a highly skilled technique of body control; therefore, they are free for artistic projection. Because the fundamental basis of her art is imaginative and unconventional, the result is provocative. Like any experimental art, what happens on the stage is not always beautiful according to accepted ideas. Sometimes the result is stark, primitive and angular, but invariably strong and interesting.

Miss Graham's art is also not limited in subject matter. Last night, for instance, she closed with the familiar "Punch and the Judy," one of her most famous pieces, which is generally humorous and some times uproarious. "Deaths and Entrances," one of the new works she premiered some months ago, completed the program. This "legend of poetic experience" is a vivid piece and is stunningly performed by her company.

During this week the company will present various of its more successful pieces, performed over a period of years. If you feel like giving your thought generator an adventure, you'll enjoy a trip to the National.