

THE DANCE: WASHINGTON FESTIVAL

By JOHN MARTIN

FOR the third time since their inauguration the music festivals sponsored by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in the Library of Congress have included the dance in their schedule, and for the third time have done so with distinction. In 1928 the world première of Stravinsky's "Apollon Musagète" in its original choreography by Adolph Bolm took place there; in 1931 Irene Lewisohn presented a program which included as its high point Doris Humphrey's choreographic setting of Ernest Bloch's string quartet; and now last week Martha Graham presented three especially commissioned works with scores, also commissioned, by Darius Milhaud, Paul Hindemith and Aaron Copland.

The result was distinctly impressive. Indeed, two of the works take their places at once among the finest of Miss Graham's achievements. The third (or rather the first, in order of presentation) was not notably successful. This was "Imagined Wings," set to music which Milhaud, composer of ballets for Diaghileff, Rolf de Maré, and others, has called "Jeux de Printemps." On the face of it, this is not inevitable Graham material.

"Mirror Before Me," for which Hindemith has supplied the title of "Hérodiade, de Stéphane Mallarmé, récitation orchestrale," is by that token not ideal, either, but Miss Graham has made such magnificent use of its basic substance and quality that all difficulties disappear and a stirring work evolves. As for "Appalachian Spring," for which Aaron Copland has written the fullest, loveliest and most deeply poetical of all his theatre scores, there would seem to have been no differences to be reconciled at any point. It is, as the saying goes, a natural.

"Mirror Before Me" is a curious work, dark in color, ominous and anguished. A woman waits for some ordeal, the nature of which is unknown to her. While she waits she scrutinizes herself inwardly and "with self-knowledge comes acceptance of her destiny." It is as dramatic as if there were gunplay and counterplot, though its movement is in effect slow and consciously controlled, and the only other character in the action is a thoroughly sympathetic attendant, with whom there is no



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Martha Graham and Erick Hawkins in a new work presented at Coolidge Foundation festival in the Library of Congress.

conflict. (This role, incidentally, is danced superbly by May O'Donnell.) The emotional impact of the choreography—its relation to the music, its utilization of the three wonderfully designed scenic objects by Isamu Noguchi, and, of course, its performance—is tremendous, and one carries the memory of it for days.

But if the tone of this is somber, that of "Appalachian Spring" is shining and joyous. On its surface it fits obviously into the category of early Americana, but underneath it belongs to a much broader and a dateless category. It is, indeed, a kind of testimony to the simple fineness of the human spirit.

These two strata of the specific and the intangible are in constant interplay. There is, for example, a setting (again beautifully designed by Mr. Noguchi), which is both definitely a house and clearly something larger than that. The action centers around a husbandman and his bride who have built the house and are, in effect, here dedicating it to the future—their

future. With them are a passionate revivalist and a little group of his followers, whose future is a promised land in the hereafter; and a pioneer woman whose promised land is perhaps more realistic but no less a matter of faith. These figures are at the same time friends and fellows of the husband and wife and symbols of their minds and inward urgings.

Miss Graham endows the bride with the clear, whole faith of young idealism. In one particular solo passage she touches into being such a radiant quality of the vision of youth into a longed-for and, indeed, a predestined fulfillment that she is likely to bring tears very close to the surface of more than one pair of eyes. Nowhere in her entire repertoire is there a more enchanting passage. The whole work obviously could not be sustained on this level. There are even a few passages that seem by comparison barren, but they will no doubt be remedied before the composition is performed again. And that should, in all conscience, be soon.