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Dance Preview

Jan. 16, 1945

New Works Promised By Miss Graham

All the works announced for Martha Graham's performances at Jordan Hall Friday evening, Jan. 26, and Saturday afternoon, Jan. 27, will be new to Boston. But the dance-comedy, "Every Soul is a Circus," was presented by Miss Graham and her company at Wheaton College in November, 1940, and at Wellesley College in December, 1942, so that it is not entirely new to New England.

The strange, dark-toned "Deaths and Entrances" (music by Hunter Johnson) had its premiere in New York in December, 1943, and created such a sensation it was repeated the following January, and later included in the great American dancer's first one-week Broadway repertory season, given at the National Theater in the spring.

This work was said at the time of its premiere to have been rather remotely inspired by the lives of the Brontë sisters in their bleak house on the moors. The Deaths and Entrances of the title (taken from a poem by Dylan Thomas) refer to the memories and reflections, the thoughts, hopes, desires, loves, hates and fears passing through the three sisters' minds. For there are three sisters (seen also as remembered in childhood) and they are not happy. The writer, having seen this work only twice, can make no other recommendation than that the spectator relax (if he can) and let the dance say to him what it will.

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Miss Graham's latest success, achieved no longer ago than Oct. 30, when it had its premiere at the Coolidge Chamber Music Festival in Washington, is so new it has not yet been seen in New York, although that is due to the theater shortage there. This is "Appalachian Spring" (with score by Aaron Copland) already vociferously celebrated in print. In addition to newspaper and magazine articles recently noted on this page, there comes to attention the December issue of Mayfair, devoting two pages to it, with illustrations.

Excerpted herewith is the synopsis of "Appalachian Spring" as published in Mayfair:

"'Appalachian Spring' opens with a Revivalist in somber brown (Merce Cunningham) and four Followers in faded blue (Pearl Lang, Nina Fonaroff, Yuriko, and Margery Mazia) depicting the search for greater spiritual faith, for closer harmony with God. They represent the founding of America by the religious sects that established their homes in the New World, despite hardships, dangers, and the ever-pressing fear of the unknown, to secure for themselves and their children the right to worship as they please.

"Their first sequence completed, they retire to positions on stage and remain there motionless."

At the head of each movement sequence described, there is an italicized passage, probably from the program notes, but these must be omitted for lack of space.

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"The second performer, the Pioneer Woman (May O'Donnell), enters the stage as the revivalist group retires. Dressed in warm brown, the color of rich, fallow earth newly turned by the plow, she typifies the fight of man against the wilderness, the Westward movement that in one brief century pushed the frontiers of America to the Pacific, forged between the two oceans one nation.

"Her solo ended, she moves to a position on the stage and remains there motionless.

"Then enters a couple, the Bride (Martha Graham, herself) and the Husbandman (Erick Hawkins). Their duet represents their entering a new life, depicts their joy in the completion of their new house, a rough clapboard affair that will grow with the land into a typical American home. The color tones are subdued, the bride in a cream-colored taffeta dress, the husband severe in linsey trousers and light shirt. Their first number completed, they retire to positions on the stage, and the rotation of performances continues with all seven dancers remaining there throughout the entire presentation, which lasts almost an hour."

The setting is by Isamu Noguchi, the costumes by Edythe Gilfond, and the chamber orchestra is conducted by Louis Horst. Miss Gilfond also designed the costumes for "Deaths and Entrances," for which Arch Lauterer designed the décor.

These three works are scheduled for the performance of Jan. 26. "Mirror Before Me" (score by Paul Hindemith), the second of the commissioned Coolidge Festival works to win critical approbation, has been announced for that of Jan. 27.

M. L.