Boston, Mass. "Christian Science Monitor" Jan. 29, 1945

# Return of Martha Graham

## Large Audiences Acclaim Dancer in Two Appearances

By Margaret Lloyd

Aaron Richmond presented Martha Graham and Her Dance Company in Jordan Hall Friday night and Saturday afternoon, and the house was filled for both performances. Friday night, being on the Celebrity subscription series, was sold out in advance; but Saturday afternoon, sold piecemeal as it were, brought a larger percentage of dance-lovers. Result: a far more incandescent performance at the matinée.

The Friday night audience received the quiet radiance of "Appalachian Spring" with quiet approval, was properly baffled (as everybody is at first) by the surcharged mysteries of "Deaths and Entrances." When the comedy, "Every Soul is a Circus," was reached, the audience, not expecting to laugh, neglected to pick up the laugh lines as they came along and so the give and take that makes the work go was missing.

But at the matinée, though "Appalachian Spring" was still fairly solemn in its sweet and gracious lyricism, and "Mirror Before Me" grim and stark in its implications, the audience was ready to play along with Miss Graham when the time came, and the little comedy approximated its old scintillating self again.

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There is real beauty in "Appalachian Spring," the new work commissioned for the Coolidge Chamber Music Festival at Washington last October, and it was beautifully performed (and lighted) Saturday. Its folk flavor runs through Aaron Copland's crystal score (also commissioned for the Festival); the music sings through the dancing. Edythe Gilfond has appropriately clothed the characters, and Isamu Noguchi imaginatively set the scene in an outline of the house, chair, steps, bench and fence that enter into the action.

This ballad of the building of a home, the building of a nation, is simple compared to some of the artist's sterner works, though its fleeting imagery cannot and should not be analyzed in words. Miss Graham as the Bride has some lovely solos and charming duo passages with Erick Hawkins, the Husbandman. Merce Cunningham has a wonderful solo that is exhortation in movement. And the four little dancers—Nina Fonaroff, Pearl Lang, Marjorie Mazia and Yuriko—are as fresh and delightful as their own springtime of youth. May O'Donnell, the Pioneering Woman, glows with tenderness and a kind of exaltation, besides doing some amazing technical things. Because the pattern of their parts has not been set by others, this original cast seems right and satisfying.

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But in "Deaths and Entrances" one missed the superb dancers, Jane Dudley and Sophie Maslow, as the sisters of the protagonist, just as in "Every Soul is a Circus" one missed Jean Erdman as the Ideal Spectator. We Graham fans want our Graham works preserved in status quo, but casts are always changing, and so is Miss Graham.

On third viewing for this writer (an unfair advantage) "Deaths and Entrances" disclosed more of its momentous detail and revealed the unity of its design, the logic under all its apparent irrationality.

These direful experiences one sees are moments lived in memory, perhaps, as Lois Balcom suggests in Dance Observer, between the first and last moves in a game of chess. Memories of childhood, of lost loves, of hatreds and jealousies and longings, come and go, summoned by the touch or sight of some object in the house (an experience everybody knows) so intensified as to become present reality. The objects are revered, as domestic objects sometimes are. They are put in different places, or removed altogether (one cannot yet account for all these moves). But the blue goblet seems to be the chief of these inanimate actors, and when the anguished sister who is Miss Graham places it with an air of finality on the chessboard at the end, one hopes for her sake it is the moment of ultimate vision promised in the program book.

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The second commissioned Coolidge work, "Mirror Before Me." with Paul Hindemith's intense, dark-toned music, is enthralling, and only mildly nonplussing. The idea is distilled from the story of Herodias (by remote association) so one can partially understand the agonizing of a woman who looks into a long, glassless mirror and sees something worse than signs of approaching age. Miss Graham is glorious in her long, sacrificial robes, and Miss O'Donnell as her attendant has created a role that belongs to her. Noguchi's décor is striking. His mirror frame is made of a semblance of bleached bones like those in Picasso's or Georgia O'Keefe's paintings. The clothes-tree repeats the theme. A stark white screen and chair against the backdrop add notes of emphasis.

Technically both music and dancing were of a high order of excellence throughout. The chamber orchestra was led by Miss Graham's long-time music director Louis Horst, who also played the piano part in the Hindemith.