



Words and Music

Copland's 'Appalachian Spring' Danced by Graham's Company

By Harriett Johnson

The strength of Martha Graham last night in "Appalachian Spring" was like a current of vigor shooting up from a deep-down source. The source, although giving the impression of being all in one piece, was not. This, however, was to the good.

"Appalachian Spring" was long heralded and with much fanfare. Born a celebrity, I predict it's going to stay that way. The work was originally commissioned for Miss Graham by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation. At its Washington premiere last fall, the "Spring" had an instant success; so much so that an extra performance had to be scheduled. To top off everything nicely, Aaron Copland's music for the piece recently won the Pulitzer Prize.

New Yorkers, however, did not get their eyes or ears close to it until last night. After many delays, the dancer with her company finally coralled the National Theatre and opened for a week's engagement. Naturally they opened with "Appalachian Spring"; also with "Salem Shore" and "Deaths and Entrances," seen here on previous occasions.

A Good Firecracker

There's danger in whetting the expectations too long and too pungently. "Appalachian Spring" however, was not like the firecracker which went off too soon or too faintly. Its sound and sight are intended to be strong and they are.

But to get back to the source. A package of three usually causes excitement and this source of

excellence is triple: Copland, Graham and Company.

Mr. Copland's music is sincere and unadorned by superficial musical eccentricities. Miss Graham's choreography is not always easy to comprehend but arresting like a whole series of short angular sentences that make you sit up and take notice through the power of their subject matter. Miss Graham's company, like Miss Graham, is excellent in its individualistic kind of technique and expression.

"Appalachian Spring" expresses the ideas, hopes, dreams and everyday life of a Bride, a Pioneering Woman, a "Husbandman," a Revivalist and four Followers. They seek the "Promised Land" of the West. They pause at the Appalachian mountains. The bride and her husband take pride in building a house. There is a revival meeting. The bride rocks her baby. People sit on the porch and think.

Isamu Noguchi's set is imaginative in inverse ratio to its simplicity. A skelton of a house and nothing more. An orchestra of seventeen conducted by Louis Horst plays Mr. Copland's score. The warmth and directness of his music are closely integrated with Miss Graham's choreography which is stark yet tender and always compelling. "Appalachian Spring" leaves you with a glow, like a day that brought with it a delightful surprise.