

CRITICAL and AMUSEMENTS

Hague

Graham Dances Pioneer Spring

A few doors from the lively actuality of Times Square, at the National Theater, Martha Graham and her serious little band of dancers, musicians, readers and "artistic collaborators" have set up shop. There, for the rest of this week, her devoted and special, but numerous, public may enjoy the fruits of their high priestess' recent choreographic labors along with her more familiar excursions into the unique and artistically limited world of her fancy.

And should a stranger, by chance or out of curiosity, wander into one of these performances and see *Appalachian Spring*, which was given its New York premiere Monday night, he won't have too bad a time. For the new work is a relatively pleasant one, easy to understand and laden with no hidden meanings. He may wonder why the dancers on the stage are so over-intense in expressing the more obvious motions, why their fists are



Martha Graham, who began a week's engagement with her dance company last night at the National.

always clenched, why their eyes are always cast way up or way down, why any strong feeling is always expressed by rolling on the floor. But if he's bored by all this, he can at least listen to and enjoy the Aaron Copland music to which the work is danced—a very fine score indeed and one which was recently awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

With *Appalachian Spring*, Miss Graham emerges from the Victorian parlor of *Deaths and En-*

trances and comes out of doors into the fresh air to give us one of those frontier pieces which attempts to express the pioneer spirit of young America. This time it's about the settlers who paused in Pennsylvania at the first continental barrier before the long trek West began. The pattern is a simple one: Spring is celebrated "by a man and a woman building a house with joy and love and prayer; by a revivalist and his followers in their shouts of exaltation; by a pioneering woman with her dreams of the Promised Land."

Much of the movement Miss Graham has devised is striking and original. But it is not well integrated; it stops and starts again, it lacks continuity, it does not seem to flow into a whole. And, emotionally, it is rarely affecting, except at the very end, when, for a moment or two, her pioneers stop

striking, relax and act like human beings.

As the Bride, Miss Graham has many fine passages and in one solo in particular she is successful in capturing a young girl's feeling of joy and ecstasy. Erick Hawkins has some athletic moments as the Husband but is mostly required to be merely stern and muscle-bound. As the Pioneering Woman, May O'Donnell looks just like that but hasn't been given very much to do. Merce Cunningham, as the Revivalist, is more fortunate. He has been provided with some effective leaps and turns, set off by a group of four very pretty followers (Nina Fonaroff, Marjorie Mazia, Ethel Winter, Yuriko) who dance very nicely too.

—ROBERT A. HAGUE