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The Theatre:

1945

Graham Dancers At the National

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Martha Graham brought her dance company to the National Theatre last evening and members of the super arty set bubbled with joy. Interest centered in "Appalachian Spring," which was first given in the Library of Congress.

Aaron Copland composed the music for the new work and it won him a Pulitzer Prize. There may be arguments over the Graham choreography, but most musicians are likely to agree that the Copland score is really something.

A program note describes the piece: "Part and parcel of our lives is that moment of Pennsylvania Spring when there was 'a garden Eastward in Eden.' Spring was 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 exulation; by a pioneering woman with her dreams of the Promised Land."

This is unfolded in terms of what has come to be known as the Martha Graham version of the modern dance. Dancers hop, skip and jump; roll, crawl and writhe on the floor; spin, shimmy-she-wabble and shudder. It is made of dashes of ballet, oriental dance, folk dance, plastic poses, hopscotch and wrestling. It is a pretentious hybrid.

The women wear long, flowing skirts, which, whirling, form intriguing pictorial patterns. Men and women occasionally achieve lines that are striking and dramatic. They sometime move delightfully. They most often move as though they were seized by cramps. They look unhappy or assume dead-pans.

Graham fans are enthusiasts and philosophers. Intermissions become forums.

"You'll love this next one," said one gent to his companion. "It's so beautifully neurotic. They all hate each other."

"Oh, how wonderful," responded the pal.

They were referring to "Deaths and Entrances," a "legend of the heart's life."

"You are a lowbrow," said one disgruntled lady to her boy friend. "Can't you understand that Graham translates inner emotion into outer motion?"

"Yeah," said the boy friend placatingly.

Observed another aesthete: "She is the Stanislavsky of the dance. Notice those wonderful groupings, that marvelous timing, that motion. If only she had a choreographer."

There's plenty of excitement and illuminating conversation on tap at the National all this week.

The first nighters gave "Appalachian Spring" an ovation. There were cheers and bravos for Graham and Copland, particularly the latter. The response to "Salem Shore" and "Deaths and Entrances" seemed lukewarm.