May 16 1945 **MUSIC** Brooklyn "Eagle"

By Miles Kastendieck

Martha Graham Introduces 'Herodiade,' Excels in Her 'Letter to the World'

While "Herodiade" was the new item on Martha Graham's program at the National Theater last night, it was an old work, "Letter to the World," which dominated the evening. "Salem Shore" was the opening number.

In its first performance, "Herodiade" proved to be only mildly interesting. Concerned as it is with the thoughts and feelings, anxieties and misgivings, memories and anticipations of a woman waiting for the unknown to happen, the work calls for as close scrutiny as the woman gives herself before a mirror. The mood of expectation has its mixture of confusion and of self-possession, all of which is worked out in a typical Martha Graham pattern. That there should appear to be an impression of repetition and even of artificiality in the choreography limits the appeal. Also coming as it did after such a solo work as "Salem Shore," which conveys its mood more directly, "Herodiade" provided insufficient variety to set it off effectively.

Interest in Hindemith's music increased as the work unfolded. This is an expert score, exhibiting the composer at his smoothest. Without holding any particular attraction, it serves its purpose, is skillfully contrived, and meets the demands Miss Graham makes of it.

"Letter to the World" exerts a tremendous pull on this reviewer. On closer acquaintance, it reasserts itself as certainly one of the most completely satisfying creations, if not the outstanding work of her career to date. What leads to this conclusion is the persistent feeling that it has more sustained inspiration than any other. The spoken words undoubtedly underline this impression, especially when so beautifully delivered by Jean Erdman. The performance was an entrancing one with the company in top form. Jane Dudley was guest artist along with Miss Erdman. Merce Cunningham's "March" was a fine bit of dancing. Miss Graham was, as always, superb. It is unfortunate that Hunter Johnson's score is not so distinguished as the work itself.

Performances continue at the National Theater through Saturday evening with a matinee that day.