



Arnold Eagle  
Martha Graham and Company in "Appalachian  
Spring," Copland's Pulitzer Prize music.

## Moderns in Review

"DANCE" June 1945

MARTHA GRAHAM, modern-dancer-in-extraordinary, opening at the National Theatre with her Dance Company for the week of May 14-20 was the long-awaited event of the modern dance season. Repercussions of the acclaim given in Washington last October to her two numbers commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in the Library of Congress had been edging local interest to such a fine pitch that, seemingly, it could go no higher. And then, last week musician Aaron Copland was handed the Pulitzer Prize for the score for one of them, *Appalachian Spring*! By permission of the Foundation its premiere took place on opening night. The following evening was scheduled the premiere of the other commissioned work, *Herodiade*, to music of Paul Hindemith.

Of Martha Graham one may really say that every movement has an emotional impulse behind it. There is never a mere echo, an empty, conventional, meaningless turn—movements that so readily disintegrate into the stereotyped with the lesser—though one may not grasp her meaning at once. Perhaps the strange thing is, it is not necessary to define exactly with

what her gesture is charged. To Mr. Copland's fresh and pulsating music, Martha Graham and Dance Company "make big" a moment of Pennsylvania spring, evoking the deep sense of fulfillment in the frontier lives on the American land. "Spring," reads the program, "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 exaltation; by a pioneering woman with her dreams of the Promised Land."

We get the feel of our folkways, the American daring and the stalwart pioneering; the pulse of life in these mountains and woodlands and the rivers running through them. There are passages of dance that etch themselves forever on the mind. An alignment of stilled figures, but each one remaining individualized and potent, becomes not less aesthetically satisfying than the figures on a Grecian urn. From this suddenly, as Copland's music looses a storm, the Bride breaks into a spirited, rugged solo; then joined by the Husbandman, the mood rounds off into a *pas de deux* of sheer tender dance.

What is so inspiring is the fine dance opportunities Miss Graham cho-

reographs for the other members of the company, too. Each stands out whole in his or her own right.

A magnificent solo by the Revivalist, the part carried by Merce Cunningham, is danced with such evocative frenzy and simultaneous fine feeling for line, it is a wonder the audience doesn't begin marching down the aisles as his converts! Miss Graham is the Bride; Erick Hawkins, the Husbandman. The Pioneering Woman is May O'Donnell's role and the four Followers are Nina Fonaroff, Marjorie Mazia, Ethel Winter and Yuriko. Isamu Noguchi provided the abstracted outlines of the farmhouse on the land.

The number was second on the evening's program. First came *Salem Shore*, a "ballad of a woman's longing for her beloved's return from the sea"—a tender and moving solo by Martha Graham to Paul Nordoff's music and Merce Cunningham's eloquent off-stage reading. It was a joy to watch the dance artist's smooth choreographic transition in mood. Arch Lauterer was the artistic collaborator, giving us something of a ledge from which the young woman might look out to sea and a twisted hoop, symbolic of the wedding ring.

Third and final was the now well-known *Deaths and Entrances*. "This is a legend of the heart's life . . . It concerns three sisters 'doom eager' to fulfill their destiny . . . essentially a legend of poetic experience . . ." The "Deaths and Entrances" of hopes, fears, remembrances, dreams" make tense the scene and no least incipient gesture escapes projection. The drama is Freudian, movement inward, angular, stark, even shuddering and the moments exciting down to the three "doom eager" sisters' final phrases at the chessboard. Surely, no one but a Graham would dare send an audience home on so grim a finale. But this first-night audience, overflowing into standees in the rear, left the theater purged and exalted. Martha Graham had been absorbing to the finish.

Music was by Hunter Johnson. The artistic collaboration again by Arch Lauterer. Louis Horst conducted the orchestra, Edythe Gilfond created the costumes for the entire performance, and the lighting was by Jean Rosenthal. Characters for the last number are:

The Three Sisters, Martha Graham, May O'Donnell, and Pearl Lang. The Three Remembered Children, Nina Fonaroff, Marjorie Mazia, Ethel Winter. The Dark Beloved, Erick Hawkins; the Poetic Beloved, Merce Cunningham. The Cavaliers, Richard Hylton and William Swatzell.

R.S.S.

By the time we caught up with the other new work, *Herodiade*, at the end of the week on May 19, its success had been fully established in the metropolitan dailies. In Washington, last autumn, it was given as *Mirror Before Me* but composer Paul Hindemith asked it be re-named what he had originally called his music, which had been suggested by Mallarmé's poem *Herodiade*. The dance is not to be taken as being in any way connected with either poem or title.

Two characters solely are on stage, a woman and her attendant, danced respectively by Martha Graham and May O'Donnell. The two wait in an antechamber, the purpose of the woman's presence vague but one of dread and, uncertain thus of her fate, she sinks into an "anguish of scrutiny," her eye turned inward upon herself. It is a fairly brief piece. Soon the servant is solemnly assisting the woman in the final rites of dressing for her fate. Great dignity is in evidence and the woman emerges ennobled from her purple and black robe in shimmering white, as "with self-knowledge comes acceptance of her mysterious destiny." The music is somber and haunting and beautiful, as is the high-pitched drama that keeps us mesmerized. The attendant's movements on a gentler, more commonplace plane underscores the sharp, bitten characterization of the central figure, whose movements become suffused with overtones of grandeur.