

THE DANCE

By WALTER TERRY

Work of Genius

WITH each succeeding season Martha Graham has grown in stature as an artist, presenting her audiences with dance works of ever-increasing magnitude. For her premiere of last evening, highlighting the third program in her Plymouth Theater series, she offered us a work of such heroic proportions that only a genius could have created it. "Dark Meadow," with its theme of renaissance, is just that, a work of genius and a new triumph for Miss Graham. The staggering demands of this difficult theme have been met in every instance and "Dark Meadow" emerges as a revelation and a testament of the eternity of mankind. Through the revealing power of her movements, her gestures and her patterns of action, she indicates that slight thread of immortality which runs unbroken through the history of man in spite of death and destruction and loss.

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The artist finds proof of this eternity in the forces of memory of love and of new birth. "Dark Meadow" commences with a ritual dance subtitled "Remembrance of the ancestral footsteps," and in her choreography Miss Graham has succeeded in creating an archaic rite, neither racial nor nationalistic, but one which suggests a mother-source for all mankind. Since ritual is a timeless device through which man seeks contact with the divine and with the eternal, its use in "Dark Meadow" stands for the force of memory, not a by-rote memory of things learned, but an instinct-memory of things inherited. The archaic chorus of dancers who appear in this initial ritual, return again and again throughout the work as a constant reminder of man's link with his distant past and his guide to the future. Miss Graham dances the role of the One Who Seeks, a figure who is at first tortured by the fear of loss and of death and who finds rebirth in the memory of ancestral footsteps, in the ceaselessness of

Carlos Chavez



Who composed the music for Martha Graham's "Dark Meadow," which was given its premiere last evening

love and in the resurging energy of all living things.

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May O'Donnell enacts the figure of She of the Ground and Erick Hawkins is He Who Summons, and both supply the contacts, the various experiences which lead to the renaissance of the One Who Seeks. Together with Miss Graham and the dancing chorus they give "Dark Meadow" the fervor of a religious experience, for "Dark Meadow" is religious in that it deals with the mystery of rebirth and the explanation of at least a portion of that mystery.

Aside from the triumphant handling of the theme, Martha Graham has also made of "Dark Meadow" a work which is of endless fascination from the viewpoint of sheer design. There is a wealth of inventive and stunning patterns, movements of such brilliance that one finds himself holding his breath, and static moments of pictorial splendor. Here then is a work which can, I am certain, be seen many times, with each new visit disclosing further beauties, further experiences. Carlos Chavez, who composed the score for this production, which was commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, has supplied superb music of a primitive, folk-like quality admirably suited to the archaic qualities of the dance. The decor was by Isamu Noguchi and the costumes by Edythe Gilfond, and in both instances one could have asked for no finer collaboration from associate artists. The remainder of the program consisted of "Salem Shore" and "Every Soul Is a Circus." Tonight's program will offer "Salem Shore," "Herodiade" and the season's first presentation of "Punch and the Judy."