

Marthas Vineyard

N.Y. "Sun"

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Not the Island, but the Land of Fantasy
Worked by Martha Graham.

By IRVING KOLODIN.

At the risk of offending the good citizens of Edgartown and Vineyard Haven, one may borrow the title of their island, in the Atlantic and redefine Marthas Vineyard as a large theater (the Plymouth) entirely surrounded by Graham enthusiasts. That will hold for this week end and all of the next seven days, as Miss Graham and her company dance out their fortnight's season.

Why one should think of Miss Graham's current work in terms of an island is easy to explain. It (specifically her latest novelty "Dark Meadow") is remote, difficult of access, and if one may say so, prevailing fog-bound. Whether this is simply the result of a miscalculation—and every artist has one every so often—or is indicative of a new trend in her work would be difficult to say. Possibly it is a little of both, for it shares the characteristic of such other recent creations of hers as "Appalachian Spring" in being more than half an hour in length. In the theater, anyway, time does not always fly.

'Dark Meadow.'

It seems ironic, on this occasion of her first sponsorship by popularizer S. Hurok, and the reasonable supposition that she will be seen by a larger, less specialized public, that Miss Graham should devote her major effort to a work whose complete description in the program is: "The action of 'Dark Meadow' is concerned with the adventure of seeking. This dance is the reenactment of the Mysteries which attend that adventure: Remembrance of the ancestral footsteps, Terror of loss, Ceaselessness of love, Recurring ecstasy of the flowering branch."

If this seems vague in the reading, it is as nothing beside the intricate confusion that prevails in the action of the dance. Would a lengthier explanation in the program help? I doubt it, for the problem is not length, but clarity. The suggestion in these words is that the core of the idea has eluded Miss Graham herself, and what she is saying has not been thought through sufficiently.

Design, Movement, et al.

I have read some admiring prose about the "design" of the work, its "ingenious craftsmanship" and "invention." A few who grant their confusion about its meaning crack back, "What does 'Les Syphides' mean?" Well, if Miss Graham had called this piece "Arabesque," "Rondo,"

"Opus 140," or something else to suggest a pure abstraction, it would be subject to a different kind of appraisal. But when she offers us a symbolic title, and a few morsels of words to nibble on, we are not being unreasonable in expecting a tangible flavor as we chew it over.

Moreover, it is against the purely "meaningless beauty" of such works as "Les Sylphides" that the modern dance has set its collective face. But in evad-

ing this kind of artificiality, it has built up its own kind of artificiality, worse confounded by the pretentiousness of the ideas it frequently embodies.

Past and Future.

Thinking back over the work that Miss Graham has done for a dozen years and more, memory recalls the force and expressiveness of such things as "Lamentation," "Frontier," "Celebration" and "Primitive Mysteries." There was compactness in their statement, an economy both of time and means. Of the recent lengthier things, the profound effect of "Letter to the World" is certainly due in part to the spoken lines of Emily Dickinson's poetry, the mood they convey, the definite links they provide with the thoughts in Miss Graham's mind.

Perhaps the soil in "Marthas Vineyard" is as fertile as ever. But in planting for the new crop, let us hope Miss Graham remembers that the fruit need not necessarily be bigger and better, but merely a little firmer—not to say rounder, more fully packed.