

Martha Graham and Dance Company. Miss Graham and her company inhabited the Plymouth Theatre for two weeks, January 21 through February 2. This year's company consisted of Erik Hawkins, Merce Cunningham, May O'Donnell, Nina Fonaroff, Pearl Lang, Marjorie Niaz, Ethel Winter, Angela Kennedy, Natanya Neumann, Mark Ryder, David Zellmer, Douglass Watson, Helen McGehee, Yuriko, and as special guests for performances of *Letter to the World*, Jean Erdman and Jane Dudley. Not only did the group give Miss Graham excellent cooperation,

but they held the stage admirably when on their own.

The repertoire was drawn from works of recent seasons—*Appalachian Spring*, *Herodiade*, *Every Soul is a Circus*, *Salem Shore*, *Deaths and Entrances*, *Letter to the World*, *Punch and the Judy*, Mr. Hawkins's *John Brown*, and one new work, *Dark Meadow*.

Of the most recent dances *Appalachian Spring* remains the warmest and sunniest. Unlike other of Miss Graham's creations, it is a product of absolute quality . . . the set by Isamu Noguchi, costumes by Edythe Gilfond, the most tuneful "dancey" music ever given to a modern dancer (Aaron Copland's score) and beautifully fused choreography. This fusion of choreography where group movement is as strong as solo movement is becoming more and more characteristic of Miss Graham's work, and it makes for domestic solidity.

*Appalachian Spring* is one of few compositions that give Merce Cunningham opportunity to display the magnificent virtuosity of which he is capable. His solo section, while slower in tempo than last season, remains a highlight.

Although Mr. Hawkins's acting has improved somewhat this year, his choreography in *John Brown* remains naïve. True, the basic idea is laudable and pertinent, but the method of composition is at best clumsy. What emerges is a spoken dialogue between Captain John Brown (Mr. Hawkins) and the Interlocutor (Erik Martin) with the dance as a fragmentary accompaniment . . . one more proof that nobility of idea does not suffice to make valid dance.

The other works in Miss Graham's repertoire stand up exceedingly well under repetition, especially when the

repetition is as fine as was indulged in this season.

The new work, *Dark Meadow*, was commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in the Library of Congress, presented with its permission. Since its first performance on January 23, much has been written and said about *Dark Meadow*, for like all of Miss Graham's major works, it bears a highly personal approach, and gives rise to volumes of controversy, discussion, condemnation, and praise.

The main criticism levelled against *Dark Meadow* is obscurity. But here

we deal with a relative term. The program notes list the dance as the "adventure of seeking," the "re-enactment of the Mysteries which attend that adventure." Signposts along the adventure are "Remembrance of the Ancestral Footsteps," "Terror of Loss," "Ceaselessness of Love," and "Recurring Ecstasy of the Flowering Branch." These are developed through a simple set of characters: She of the Ground, portrayed by May O'Donnell; He Who Summons, danced by Erik Hawkins; They Who Dance Together, portrayed by eight members of the group; and One Who Seeks, by Miss Graham.

*Dark Meadow* does not have a plot in the storybook sense of the word. This is replaced by carefully developed structural formality. *Dark Meadow* does not have a set in the Broadway sense of the word. *Dark Meadow* contains few clichés—even Graham clichés.

Incisively and often fiercely it delves into the world of emotion and draws forth sensations and yearnings common to all men in varying degrees, but rarely acknowledged or recognized. The work is obscure because it deals with an obscure world. By the same token it is luminously clear. For anything that adds to one's insight or enables the observer to identify himself with all or part of the proceedings on stage has clarity.

Although many of the choreographic patterns are strikingly original, this work is not a drastic departure from Miss Graham's recent creative vein. It is a step forward in her steady artistic growth.

The evolution begins roughly with *Every Soul is a Circus*, a portrait of a human spirit that cannot profit from experience. Then comes *El Penitente*, an archaic religious ritual with sug-

gested overtones left undeveloped to preserve the flavor of the trio. In *Letter to the World* comes the evolution of an artist. With *Deaths and Entrances* we arrive at the first probings of memory and the sub-conscious hinted at in the preceding works; and in *Dark Meadow* all the tendencies burst forth ruthlessly and dramatically. One cannot help wondering where Miss Graham's fertile imagination will take her next.

And if one does not care to go along with the powerful emotional and intellectual drive of *Dark Meadow*, there

is much from a theatrical point of view to attract the eyes and ears. The decor, a series of geometric-looking objects by Isamu Noguchi, proves very versatile and through manipulation becomes part of the action. Edythe Gilfond's costumes are for the most part in keeping with the over-all flavor of the work.

Perhaps the weakest point of *Dark Meadow* is the relationship between dance and music. The dance gives the impression of moving despite the music, which neither enhances nor accompanies, but falls somewhere outside the two. At times the sheer drive and marked rhythmic patterns of the group alone or with Miss Graham as counterpoint are so complete unto themselves that one wishes the music were not there at all.

Where the fault lies it is hard to say, but it certainly is not in Louis Horst's conducting, which was of a uniformly high order throughout, especially considering that he was given so small a group to work with. It would be indeed pleasant some day to see Miss Graham and her Group backed by an instrumentation of adequate sonority.

D.M.H.

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