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Vivid Impression Is Made By New Martha Graham Dance

BY MARY LEIGHTON.

Martha Graham and her Dance Company gave a program at Emery Auditorium last night of wide expressive scope and strongly diversified atmospheric charm. The three ballets that made up the program were "Appalachian Spring" (new to Cincinnati), to Aaron Copland's music originally composed for it; "Letter to the World," to Hunter Johnson's music (introduced at Miss Graham's previous appearance here) and "Every Soul is a Circus" to music of Paul Nordoff. Their content was admirably contrasted in the sunny and refreshing simplicity of an episode in a Pennsylvania village, reflection of subjective sequences inspired by the life of Emily Dickenson, and satiric humor and mood picturization of ridiculous situations and silly behaviors.

The fascination of Miss Graham's somewhat intangible and incredible art lies in coordination of dance expression and inner feeling that exudes the realism of great theater. One may even lose the thread of the music, the continuity of dance line in the enchantment of being stirred by the appeal of the emotional substance offered in dances by Miss Graham and her admirable company.

Though "Letter To The World" proved to be the most powerful of the three offerings, "Appalachian Spring," because it is new, is entitled to first comment. The fact that Copland's music was commissioned by Miss Graham may explain in part its effective integration. The story of a husbandmen and his bride who settle in a typical early Pennsylvania village is projected in a series of solos and choral sequences charmingly hinged to set off characterizations and village life concerned with a pioneer woman, a revivalist, his followers and the newlyweds. Especially vivid were the roles of husbandman and bride, Miss Graham and Eric Hawkins, and Merce Cunningham's depiction of the revivalist. Remarkable also was the stage set, consisting of the skeleton of a modest farmhouse (the angularity of which corresponded with the music) with a single rocking chair on the porch, the latter suggestive of the couple's home.

A microcosm of pioneer community life, which gives the audience a vicarious thrill of participation in it, is given through this unique dance creation. It has a rare quality of unbroken, flowing, continuity in which contrasting individual and group experiences are deftly intermingled. This dance vivification of community life of yesterday is beautifully costumed, and its interpretation gives an extraordinary gifted company opportunity to give expression to their interpretive powers.

"Letter to the World" is remarkably gripping, although high points are so terrifying they tend to dissipate interest in lighter episodes in Emily Dickenson's life. Miss Graham's interpretive handling of apprehension of death, when she is so movingly carried as a victim, and her anguish after death actually takes her lover, were the most frighteningly credible revelations on the entire dance program. It was a superb performance and a memorable projection of the great artistry that gives powerful emotional force to everything Miss Graham offers in dance interpretations.