

THE GRAHAM DANCE RECITAL LAST NIGHT

Martha Graham Spirit and
Choreography Lift Dancing
to Great Heights.

By JACK BALCH

Because Martha Graham herself is practically a Utopian's dream of all the things a creative dancer should be, the dance recital given by Miss Graham and her company at Kiel Auditorium Opera House last night will probably be remembered by many in the attending audience of 1500 persons as the most wonderful evening of dancing they've seen in years.

Last night's recital, so far as this reviewer knows, was the first such recital here by Miss Graham. The lady, her ideas, and achievements had been penetrating to our town for years. She had been twice awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship—the first dancer to have received such an honor—for bringing the modern dance

out of the studio onto a Broadway stage. She was the first to introduce the spoken word into the dance, a theater device that has been copied since by others. She was the first dancer-choreographer in America for whom musical scores had been commissioned—from at least three different composers. Every now and then, also, to balance a kind of budget, critics had come out in print to lambast her creations as irritating, mannered, angular, too consciously "modern," etc.

From the publicity, and word-of-mouth impressions, one had expected Miss Graham to be "revolutionary," controversial and so forth, in addition to the features considered usually more purely dance. The reality was much better than the expectation. Speaking as one observer, and speaking for all, one hopes, Miss Graham's made every recital or dance program seen here in years seem pale and tepid.

A well-nigh incredible devotion to perfection in dance forms and ideas is the most salient feature of Miss Graham's theater. While it is certain that "box-office" values are abundant in Miss Graham's art, the dancing unfolds with an innocence of intensity and attention that seems not to know that the "box office" or any other extraneous matter or notes in the eye exist. And the degree of intelligence in the conceptions and

technical perfection in the executions are as high as the program's basic spirit.

The program consisted of three numbers, each of them a dance developed with all the assimilated story-telling and mood-creating properties of a novel or poem. They were "Appalachian Spring," with music by Aaron Copland; "Letter To The World," based on the poems of Emily Dickinson, and music by Hunter Johnson; and "Every Soul Is a Circus," with music by Paul Nordoff. This reviewer liked them all without stint, but was moved most particularly by the Dickinson number, a sustained bit of lyricism that had the airiness of a bird's flight, and the solidity and dramatic intricacy of the skeleton of a skyscraper.

Merce Cunningham, to come to individual credits, seemed the most exciting of the nine dancers. Angela Kennedy was equally exciting as a dancer and recitationist. The orchestra was small, but, under the direction of Louis Horst, extraordinarily fine and articulate. Miss Graham ought to bring her people here often, for she raises dance levels like banners.

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