Martha Graham Brilliant In Modern Dance Program

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By HOWARD W. HESS

MARTHA GRAHAM and Company presented "Appalachian Spring," "Letter to the World," and "Every Soul Is a Circus" at Emery Auditorium Wednesday night. All of the dancing was brilliant and at the same time smooth as old bourbon even though one of the male dancers did stumble over his own feet in one of the ensembles. The costuming was exceptionally fine. The settings were mere suggestions, especially those for "Appalachian Spring"; Isamu Noguchi simply placed a two-by-four here and a scantling there and left the rest to the imagination.

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"Appalachian Spring" is but a poetic title which Miss Graham gave to a drama of Quaker life featuring the conflicts of a young couple of natural animal vigor with the religious restrictions imposed by the pioneer American members of that sect. Miss Graham, as the young wife, portrayed the gamut of emotions lived by a somewhat impulsive but perfectly balanced young matron, and she did a good job of it. Her husband was Eric Hawkins, who made the part so real that it seemed he was an acquaintance of former years.

The outstanding dance in this number was that of Merce Cunningham who, as the Revivalist, made "Hell Fire and Damnation" singe the eyebrows of those in the front rows. May O'Donnell danced the "Pioneering Woman" with grace and she stood out as a beautiful woman dancer—why are so many top-flight dancers so ugly? Miss Graham is anything but beautiful and she was unlovely feet. The Copland music to this dance was by far the best of the evening, yet it was a woeful anachronism, for Quakers did not have music as any part of their life.

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"Letter to the World" featured the split personalities that are generally supposed to be usual spiritual and mental equipment of all artists—heaven forbid! Miss Graham danced the silent but emotional half and Angela Kennedy spoke lines from Emily Dickinson's poem. The composite picture was hardly fair to the true Emily just because it is not possible to think of Miss Dickinson as being a frustrated person. Frustration cannotes defeat; if Emily Dickinson is an example of frustration, I think it would be a good idea for everyone to go out and get themselves good and frustrated.

There was a suggestion of an old square dance which was refreshing, but the music to it was decidedly boogie-woogie. The music to the entire number was of a bilious type. The nauseous effect of the piano part was too much for me so I missed some of the dancing which might have been good, but I don't feel that way about life and death.

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"Every Soul Is a Circus" was a clowning dance, with Miss Graham as the "Silly Woman" who was constantly defeated by vanity, personified by Eric Hawkins as a "Ring Master" who cracked the whip every time Miss Graham tried to go places. The silly fun of this dance was a relief from the "much-ado-about-nothing" seriousness of the preceding numbers. The music was also better—it at least had some contrasts, and the sly references to the chromatic love motifs of "Tristan" were not lost on the audience.