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Graham Has New Dances

Audience Divided In Its Reactions

By W. E. OLIVER

After an absence of several years, Martha Graham returned to the Philharmonic last night with a program of choreographies in womanly frustration and in human exultation bounded by repression.

As before, she reveals a knack for drama in her expressionist settings and complete control of an esoteric dance form which, whether you like it or not, is bearing fruit in the more explicit choreographies of such people as Agnes De Mille and Anthony Tudor.

The reactions last night ranged from outright ecstasy of modern dance lovers to bewilderment of the average showgoer, one of whom was heard to say, "the thing to keep in mind is that everything is a point of departure."

THREE OFFERINGS

The first of Miss Graham's four performances consisted of "Appalachian Spring," symbolical representation of the urges that make people build houses, men and women mate and preachers exort the flesh into excesses of the spirit; "Letter to the World," a dance-dramatization of the frustrations that turned Emily Dickinson's awareness of beauty into poetry, and "Every Soul Is a Circus," a satire on a woman's habit of self-dramatization.

The Appalachian number has a striking setting, austere form and an amazingly agile dance by Merce Cunningham as the preacher. Aaron Copland's curious score for this offering emphasized the dour mood.

In "Letter to the World," Miss Graham dances practically every minute. Her representation of the poet's final soul agony is a profound performance. Her duet, in a red dress, with May O'Donnel, clad in black to portray Death, was the dramatic high point of the evening.

POETIC DIALOGUE

A novelty is Angela Kennedy, reciting quotations from Emily Dickinson's poetry in a not too distinct manner.

Hunter Johnson's music ably supports the atmosphere of torment.

The chief supporting dancers additionally include Erich Hawkins, Ethel Winter, Nina Ponaroff, Yuriko, Marjorie Mazia, Dorothea Douglas, David Zellmer, Mark Ryder and William Swatell.

Miss Graham's supporting troupe is well schooled to the ascetic dance line which is her outstanding characteristic. The orchestra, under Louis Horst's direction, gave competent musical support through the three difficult scores.

Program for today: Matinee, a repeat of last night's program; tonight, "Appalachian Spring," "Herodiade" and "Letter to the World."