Los Angeles, Cal. "Times," Mar. 30, 1946

Martha Graham's Dance Art Proves Arresting

BY ISABEL MORSE JONES

Martha Graham with her company appearing at the Philharmonic Auditorium now is not the same Martha Graham who danced here in 1935 and you are not the same either after you have seen her "Appalachian Spring" or "Letter to the World."

If you go to her performances this afternoon and evening or another program Wednesday night in a Russian ballet mood you will be irritated. One gentleman we watched stalk out from a front seat didn't like it and furthermore he put on his raincoat and stomped down the aisle to get his wife and go home. Everyone else seemed so absorbed, so moved that their attention never wavered an instant. Graham either grips you with the power and truth of her creations or you resent her. There is no middle course.

Stylized Dancing

The program last night was about New England. The dancing is stylized movement, infinitely more expressive than dancing "sur le point," with the whole body line a part of the design and decor. "Appalachian Spring" is a pioneer marriage and farm settling and "Letter to the World" is the life of Emily Dickinson who "lived New Englandly."

Martha Graham, whose sacrifice and devotion have made this American dance complete, without foreign elements, always has expressed herself in relation to today. In 1935 the world was different, eager and unaware. She began to dance pointedly toward the far horizons. This world is one of suffering and bitter disillusionment. Her dancers now relate to you the inspiration of our forefathers, the sweetness and the decency of their love for one woman, for their religion and for their land.

Louis Horst, musical director, conducts a small orchestra from the piano and no one else could do it as well. He has worked with the indefatigable Graham since she studied in Los Angeles.

Hunter Johnson's music to the "Letter" is not so important. The words of Dickinson's poetry, spoken as a poet would by Angela Kennedy, bind the action, while the music is incidental. Noguchi designed the first dance set of stark simplicity and Arch Lauterer, the more ornamental "Letter." Erick Hawkins and Merce Cunningham had the leads among the men and May O'Donnell took the second lead with Miss Graham.

Work Required

As Graham has said, it takes 10 years of hard body building for technique, mind enrichment and the science of kinetic expression, to be a dancer. This company has had more time than that and it is ever-changing upon a firm foundation.

Emerson said, "Art is the mixture of man's will with nature." This is the most descriptive sentence that could be summoned to fit Martha Graham's achievement.

The concert closed with "Every Soul Is a Circus."