

THE DANCE

By WALTER TERRY

Non-Conformist

Martha Graham, America's great non-conformist of dance, opened her engagement at the Ziegfeld Theater last evening with three dance works: "Appalachian Spring" in which muscles seem to sing of the beauty and the strength of our land; "Dark Meadow," an ageless world-ritual of man's search for immortality; "Every Soul Is a Circus," a satire on false pride, a biting caricature of an empty woman. For those who brought text-book standards to bear upon Miss Graham's choreographic non-conformities, there was fine craftsmanship to be appreciated but little else other than a vague sense of stimulation caused by a vivid personality. But for those who opened their hearts and removed the locks of inhibition from their imaginations, there was a flood of emotional experience not frequently encountered in the theater of dance.

In "Appalachian Spring," choreographed by Miss Graham to music of Aaron Copland, one experiences the meanings of American. There, in broad actions and in passing gestures, one finds the love of the land, the restless vision of the pioneer, the paradoxical search for permanence, faith, laughter, dignity and frolic. Through Erick Hawkins as the Husbandman, Miss Graham as the Wife, May O'Donnell as the Pioneering Woman and John Butler as the Revivalist we witness the dedication of a house, a house, which to the Wife, means safety, a

place for rearing the young, the site of gentle fun; a house, of which the Husbandman is inordinately proud, part home, part manifestation of his manly skill; a house, which means a shrine of gratitude to God in the eyes of the Revivalist; a house, which to the Pioneering Woman stands for a symbol of achievement and a threshold from which others will step toward still another frontier.

Cast in the form of a mighty, non-racial, non-eral ritual, "Dark Meadow" contains within its patterns the path of one who seeks for assurance of immortality. Proof of that immortality is found first in the dim echoes of ancestral footsteps which seem to say "we have danced before you, will dance with you, dance after you," and the one who seeks finds a measure of comfort in the unbroken stream of history itself. The fear of loss consumes her, the cloak of death surrounds, but the fearsome shroud is removed by man the mate and by the figure of re-creation. Finally, she discovers through the ageless, half-remembered patterns of the past, through the fire of love, through the magic of repro-

duction and through the symbols (the pagan phallus, the Christian cross and others) of faith, that immortality is promised to every man.

"Dark Meadow" is long, the Chavez music, though providing superb rhythmic impulses, is not engaging in itself, and the theme is a demanding one, but the ensemble patterns are among the most beautiful ever devised by Miss Graham, and the ritual itself is of compelling grandeur. It is, in my opinion, a great work, a vivid and sometimes violent but always majestic testament of faith.

The evening closed with the always popular "Every Soul Is a Circus," in which Miss Graham enacts the role of an addle-pated egocentric woman who wants to be the empress in the arena which is her life. The company provided Miss Graham with excellent support throughout the evening, particularly Mr. Hawkins, Miss O'Donnell and Mr. Butler. The orchestra was under the direction of Louis Horst. A large and enthusiastic audience was in attendance to greet the star on her opening night.