NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE,
March 1, 1947

THE DANCE

By WALTER TERRY

The final premiere of Martha Graham's season at the Ziegfeld Theater was presented last evening before a capacity audience which heartily applauded "Errand Into the Maze." This new work, with a title derived from a poem by Ben Belitt, bases its action upon "that errand-journey into the maze of the heart in order to face and do battle with the Creature of Fear." This self-assigned problem Miss Graham succeeds in solving with directness and economy of movement, with her familiar intensity and with a curious air of poignancy which somehow makes the beholder feel that he too is sharing in the battle.

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Structurally "Errand Into the Maze" is both pertinent to the theme and ingenious in design, for Miss Graham has constructed her choreography in such a way that a vast area of ominous space is created and threaded with endlessly weaving pathways, and within that space and along those lanes of action the battle with fear is fought; here, in the battle, the movements are those of search, of fleeing, of cringing, of determination, of defeat, of renewed struggle and finally of triumph. Although the structure, like the theme itself, is without period and applicable to every living soul, it is given a quality of classical grandeur through its tenuous relationship to the heroic myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, a relationship easily suggested by the choreographic realization of the maze and by the symbolizing of fear in the figure of a bull-headed man.

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If there is any point of argument with reference to the choreography it would concern the use of the Creature of Fear, for he is accorded no movements of a dance nature and is more of a mobile symbol or prop than an actual embodiment of fear itself. However, since we are meant to experience the battle with fear through the figure of the one who makes the errand, perhaps too much action on the part of the symbol would serve only to dim the true focus of the dance.

Miss Graham danced her new role in exciting fashion, her body giving physical articulation to the anguish, the terror, the fierceness and the release which the character experienced, and Mark Ryder, as the symbol of fear, brought to the simple assignment the skill necessary to its realization. The music by Gian-Carlo Menotti was superb for the purposes of the dance, rhythmically compelling, swelling to dramatic peaks in keeping with increased dynamics upon the stage and containing within its structure a repeated beat which seemed to create the terrifying sound of the heart when it booms through a stethoscope. The setting by Isamu Noguchi, beautiful and fantastic, abetted the dancer's creation of space and pattern. "Errand Into the Maze" is a dance of subdued excitement; it is not one which generates violent applause, for it is too personal for that, almost like a secret between the dancer and each individual in the audience, but it is, none the less, a distinguished dance work and of particular appropriateness in these times when fear attacks us all.

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Of special interest at this performance was the revival of "El Penitente," Miss Graham's primitive mystery suggested by the rituals of the Penitentes. On this occasion, Pearl Lang assumed the role of the Mary Figure (Virgin, Magdalen, Mother) ordinarily danced by Miss Graham, thus marking the first time that a "Graham" role was danced by any one other than the star herself. Miss Lang danced it nicely, for, although she lacked the intensity of Miss Graham and was girlish rather than womanly as the Magdalen, she was easy and accurate of movement and beautiful to look upon. Erick Hawkins was unnecessarily subdued in this performance as the Penitent and John Butler was not quite strong enough, particularly in back and arm movements, as the Christ Figure. The new Noguchi properties were not nearly as apt as the rough and heavier properties used in the earlier production, but the music of Louis Horst seemed finer than ever. "Deaths and Entrances" and "Every Soul Is a Circus" completed the bill.

Pearl Lang

Who danced the lead in Martha Graham's "El Penitente"