HERALD TRIBUNE, N.Y.
Mar. 7, 1947

THE DANCE

By WALTER TERRY

Masterpiece

Martha Graham and her company returned to the iegfeld Theater Thursday evening, following a hiatus of four days, to enter the second and final portion of their New York engagement. Featured on the program was a revival of Miss Graham's masterpiece of sixteen years ago, "Primitive Mysteries," which had had its last revival several seasons back. It remains a masterpiece, perhaps one of the dance masterpieces of all time, certainly one of the few dance masterpieces of our generation.

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"Primitive Mysteries," composed of Hymn to the Virgin, Crucifixus and Hosanna, is a ritual, perhaps a "key" ritual which does not specify any race, any faith or any period, but which applies to all. If it were performed in Cuzco's Temple of the Sun, at ancient Stonehenge, besides the hall of Karnak or in the heart of Jerusalem, I am certain that it would stir the memories and caress the hearts of all its beholders, for it is eternally primitive in its quest for divine contact, for divine guidance through ritual. Miss Graham as the Virgin and the sixteen girls as celebrants flood the clear and beautiful patterns with hypnotizing intensity. Sometimes their tread is slow and sober, sometimes they appear to be stamping magic from the earth itself through the impassioned beating of their feet, again they lift themselves upward in the reach toward ecstasy, but dignity and dedication are always present.

The wonderful processionals which open the ritual and which link its various parts establish an air of consecration, of mysterious purpose while the hymn, the act of sacrifice, the praise are enacted in such a manner that one senses the participants may have forgotten the specific meanings of their age-old ritual, but that they have not lost faith in the nameless mystery it seeks ever to solve. All of us, I think, conform to the patterns of certain rituals and find comfort in the very fact that they are non-specific and hopeful in their mystery, and it is this element which Miss Graham has captured so magnificently and with such understanding in "Primitive Mysteries" that the work pertains not to the dim past, but to the still existing primitive in each of us and to the eternal mysteries which surround us.

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It is almost impossible to speak of the motor patterns in "Primitive Mysteries" without mentioning their qualities or expressional values. However, it should be reported (or restated at this late date) that the very choreographic structure of "Primitive Mysteries" is masterly and the group designs are unbelievably beautiful. The music by Louis Horst, remote in quality yet stirring in its rhythmic compulsion to dance, provides a perfect accompaniment for the dance ritual.

The remaining offerings on the program included "El Penitente," "Cave of the Heart" and "Punch and the Judy." The extended engagement by the Graham company will come to an end with tonight's performance.