

REVIEWS OF THE MONTH

"DANCE OBSERVER" June-July 1947

Martha Graham Presents New Work "Night Journey", with Score by William Schuman, at Harvard University Festival

Cambridge High and Latin School
Cambridge, Mass.
May 3, 1947

THE Music-for-the-dance concert of Harvard University's Department of Music three-day Symposium on Music Criticism, held in the auditorium of the Cambridge High and Latin School on May 3, 1947, was devoted to two works by Martha Graham to music of Carlos Chavez and William Schuman.

At this occasion Miss Graham and her group presented a stirring performance of *Dark Meadow* for which the accompaniment by members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, under Louis Horst's infallible direction, was played better than ever. With this long work ably dispatched, Miss Graham and group got off to the real business of the evening—the premiere performance of *Night Journey*, a work commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge foundation of the Library of Congress; the musical score by William Schuman.

As a third work in a phase of her creativity which is inspired by Greek drama, Martha Graham has chosen the Oedipus story as it is lived in the fleeting reminiscences of the mother-wife Jocasta. In time "the action takes place in Jocasta's heart at the instant when she recognizes the ultimate terms of her destiny." In space it is performed in a stylized version of Jocasta's chamber. Through the reliving of her life in that last moment when the imminence of death is upon her, in that moment in which she is binding the cord around her neck, Jocasta has fleeting images which fit together to form her destiny. During that moment she shows how fate has woven that cord with which she must strangle herself.

In the opening dance of tragic resignation, and in her solo bit at the end of the work, Martha Graham has invented for herself movement patterns which are among the most evocative and beautiful in her entire repertoire. So expressive in their violence, so pro-

vocative in their implication, so moving in their emotional content are these expressions of Jocasta's realization, that Miss Graham indicates she might easily be able to tell the entire story without benefit of the actual appearance of Oedipus, or the Seer, or the Daughters of the Night. Actually these figures become little more than objects which are related to Jocasta's life. Only her character becomes truly convincing choreographically.

When the phases of Oedipus' growth from son to king-husband of Jocasta are more convincing, when the role of the Seer is enlarged in movement if not in duration of time, when the Daughters of the Night react in movement to the tragedy which is being lived in their long passage of frozen presence, the resulting unification within the work will make of *Night Journey* a logical climax to the trilogy which includes *Errand Into the Maze* as well as *Cave of the Heart*. The trilogy is one based on source of inspiration rather than of any related theme. In one we have the positive conquest of fear in *mind's strength*; in another we have the positive satisfaction in destructiveness through jealousy in *heart's anger*; in the third—*Night Journey*—we have the sympathetic, the negative resignation to fate in *soul's sorrow*.

The score by William Schuman is distinctive, stirring, ominous and foreboding, completely fitting in every respect.

As in the other recent works there is a set by Isamu Noguchi. It is of the same texture and monumentality as the sets for these other works. As we see Noguchi's sets for the Graham dances there seems to be an undeniable correlation in the works of these two artists. Each set per se seems right, each one becomes more beautiful than its predecessor, each becomes more imposing, more attention-demanding, and consequently less effective. The set for *Night Journey* in its grandeur and its obvious symbolism has become an abstraction of the story which could

almost stand by itself in a museum, and as a sculptural exhibit tell most of the story without benefit of figures. It becomes intrusive rather than intrinsic to the work. Perhaps Noguchi's theory, that "it is the sculptor who orders and animates space, gives it meaning" indicates the reason. In a Graham work it is the dance which "animates space."

N.K.