Martha Graham Coming Home as Festival Closes

1948

Martha Graham closed her part in the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College last Tuesday and soon will be on her way to Santa Barbara for her annual visit to her mother, Mrs. Homer N. Duffey, at the Mission Inn.

Her sister, Georgia, who is married to Life Magazine music critic and writer of interviews, Winthrop Sargent, may come with her. It depends on when her husband leaves for India on a Life assignment. Mrs. Sargent plans to spend the time he is absent with her mother.

Wilderness Stair

Martha Graham's new work, which she premiered at the Festival, is entitled "Wilderness Stair." It is an exhibition piece for her group and contains no role for herself.

"As such," wrote Frances Herridge in the New York Star. "It is superb."

She goes on to say: "Unfortunately Ben Belitt has added a last-minute title and some pretentious program notes that serve only to confuse. According to him, the piece tells of the diversion of angels on wilderness stair —on Jacob's Ladder to heaven.

"According to report Miss Graham had been thinking of doing a piece for her group since last October. As she watched them practice she made a note of striking movement, and gradually put them together, giving them the structural unity of a musical composition. It is not a purely abstract piece, but what emotional expression it has seems to have grown less out of previous intent than out of the movement differences she saw in her dancers.

". . . There is no apparent excuse for dragging in Jacob's vision. Out of a group of four men and six girls, three girls are individualized. One, Nataza Neumann, in a long blue costume, is often the center figure, dominant, static, mature. Pearl Lang in a shorter red costume cuts through the group frantically, passionately, in sharp off-balances. Helen McGehee in even shorter yellow costume adds the sparkle of sunlight on water. The contrasts suggest three stages of growth: childhood, adolescence and maturity. They may also suggest three types of women, or three states of mind."

Noguchi did the simple set, a monotone gray backdrop. Norman Dello Joio composed the "pleasant romantic" musical score.