

Cheer Dance at Guild Martha Graham Triumphs

by **Russell Rhodes**

If Martha Graham had wished to convert those old die-hards of the dance who have disagreed with her executed theories she could not have won a more complete victory than was hers for her first appearance this season at the Guild Theater Sunday night in a carefully prepared program of eight numbers. A capacity audience cheered her brilliant performance. At all times a provocative dancer, Miss Graham has drawn observers from two widely-separated camps—those who are avowed disciples and those frankly sold or downright inimical to her art.

It is safe to say that Sunday night's performance was the triumph of her career. Never has she danced with such fire and beauty, her work being so electrically charged and such an eminent exhibition of perfection on points that one cannot doubt her unchallenged position as one of the world's foremost modernists.

Although still wearing tape on her left foot, the result of a sprain last season, Miss Graham gave no sign of fatigue or physical handicap.

"Formal Dance" (David Diamond) and "Imperial Gesture" (Lehman Engel), were danced for the first time. In the former Miss Graham's work was stylized in the implied rigid decorum of the old-

fashioned ballroom from which a note of satire was never absent. "Imperial Gesture" is a magnificently conceived number, employing to great pictorial effect a costume of black silk with brown overskirt faced with black, skillfully manipulated, now in the manner of a cloak, now in the manner of a hood, the pattern of the dance suggesting majesty and military ceremonial, empty until it enveloped itself (as Miss Graham actually indicated) by enshrouding herself at the close.

One of her most dramatic conceptions is "American Provincials" (Louis Horst), epitomizing in stylized form the plight of Hawthorne's woman of "The Scarlet Letter," accused by early New England harsh righteousness. "Sarabande" (Lehman Engel), from the suite, "Transitions," is a gem in imagery, suggesting Old Spanish ritual before an Easter altar. "Frontier" (Horst, from the suite, "Perspectives," is still a highlight with its triumphant energy of the Covered Wagon days. This dance proved the most popular with Sunday's audience. Miss Graham's group in "Celebration" (Horst) gave a splendid performance to extremely varied choreography that made use of stage pictures and line design. The precision of the dancers was especially marked, in view of the frequently unpleasant musical accompaniment.

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