

MARTHA GRAHAM

Theresa L. Kaufman Theatre
Sunday Eve., Jan. 5, 1936

THE art of Martha Graham defies any comprehensible verbal description under any circumstances. But a solo recital including the most arresting dances from Miss Graham's several periods underscores the poverty of words and criticism.

The earliest works presented *Lamentation* (Kodaly) and *Harlequinade* (Toch) could not be overshadowed by anything but the greater depth and subtlety of the artist's later dances. Having outdistanced herself, Miss Graham casts a shadow on her earlier powers. This of course would be true in equal measure of any good art exhibition that was retrospective in character. *Lamentation* suffered most. It remains undoubtedly an excellent dance for the lay audience as do *Pessimist* and *Optimist*, the two sections of *Harlequinade*. It would be interesting to see these performed in reverse order as the bland *Optimist* loses a little of its effect in following the biting *Pessimist*.

The gradual but definite change in Miss Graham's movement since the first appearance of *Ekstasis* (Lehman Engel) caused a strange and very disturbing quality to emerge in its performance on the program. It was danced as if its creator no longer believed in it. Despite this loss of faith, real or imagined, these two lyric fragments are very beautiful. In contrast, *Satyrical Festival Song* (Weisshaus) has lost none of its earlier meaning and effect. It is as devastatingly absurd as ever.

Frenetic Rhythm (Number 3) (Wallingford Riegger) no longer startling in its space concept continues to hold its enormous popularity with audiences of every type. From the very first, onlookers have cherished it with devotion. The incomparable *Sarabande* (Lehman Engel) has rather a different history. It has gathered in force and grown increasingly ominous with each seeing. That this should be so is not surprising in view of the fact that any dance of Martha Graham's must be seen at least twice before all its implications can be encompassed. To be sure, there are those unto whom Martha Graham is given but there are also those who must struggle through stress and turmoil for that responsive and vibrant understanding they so greatly desire.

It is difficult to imagine a greater conception of religious fanaticism than that which is embodied in *Act of Piety* (Louis Horst). The universality of the implications it conveys defeat all lesser and less biting comments on the social scene. This dance and *Frontier* (Louis Horst) are the greatest manifestations of Miss Graham's genius. As such, they defy analysis. Unhindered by restrictions of space, breathtaking in its pervasive grandeur, over-

whelmingly direct and simple, *Frontier* shares the universality of *Act of Piety*. *Imperial Gesture* (Lehman Engel) and *Formal Dance* (David Diamond) were also presented.

All of this is but incontrovertible evidence that the art of Martha Graham defies any comprehensible verbal description.

The audience, with a generous sprinkling of hardy perennials, was essentially a new dance audience. This is especially heartening and is a tribute to William Kolodney who hopes to establish another center of fine dance at the Young Men's Hebrew Association.

The piano accompaniment sustained the excellent standard always expected of Louis Horst. Marion Rich, furnished the soprano part which so heightens the inevitability of *Sarabande*.

M. P. O'D.

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