DANCE REVIEWS

MARTHA GRAHAM and Dance Group

Guild Theatre
Sun. Eves., Feb. 23, March 1, 1936

"MOBILES," as used by Martha Graham in her presentation of *Horizons,* are groups of abstract designs, geometric still-life patterns in motion; spheres, cubes, hexagons, spirals, straight lines, utterly shapeless figures and the combinations of them, variously colored, moving (by mechanical means) in a fixed design. It were as if a Paul Klee had projected itself out of its canvas and put itself under the Guild floodlights.

The program note reads, "The 'Mobiles,' designed by Alexander Calder, are a new conscious use of space. They are employed in *Horizons* as visual preludes to the dances in this suite. The dances do not interpret the 'Mobiles,' nor do the 'Mobiles' interpret the dances. They are employed to enlarge the sense of horizon." We quote in full for obvious reasons.

There have been mobiles before (under various names) and they somewhat go back to the not insignificant days of da-da, pushing up into the age of surrealisme; there is a note of bravado about them, an elegance of gesture, perhaps amusing design, but nothing more. Somehow mobiles and Martha Graham do not speak the same language. Martha Graham has something to say (the artist communicates); the artist needs no aids to "enlarge the sense of horizon," and this is especially true of Graham.

Mobiles may be pleasant to watch; at best they may develop to a state of perfection, honesty, artistry when we will be able to compare them with, let us say, Kandinsky, Dali—perhaps we will have mobiles concerts. But for Martha Graham, such mechanical aids as used at these two concerts serve only to create a diffusion, have nothing to do with the dance choreography and act as distracting forces that tend to break into the unity of the composition. Perhaps, mobiles will find a way into the concert dance and, as the various stationary props, become more and more a part of dance composition; we have no real reason to suppose anything to the contrary, and rather than completely condemn the use of Calder's inventions in *Horizons,* it were better, perhaps, we realize the particular inadequacy of the particular creations, the inaptness of them, and stop there. It were certainly ridiculous to condemn mobiles ,as such, on the basis of a single experiment; while the second of these concerts did not prove a greater relationship between the dance and the mechanics, it definitely indicated (thru a better mechanical control and an attempt at subtle blending of choreography and the geometrics) possibilities in a new direction so far as accoutrements to dance are concerned.

Unfortunately, the Calder conceptions were met with either complete dismissal or an equally inept acceptance. Mobiles may be brought to the stage by boos or bravos but the fundamental issue (advisability of usage) will be obscured, as will be any other experimental development, unless some honest research, thinking and experiment decide this new direction—if it is direction.

But the concerts weren't all mobiles, and it is unfortunate that the new composition, *Horizons,* was considerably forgotten in the general uncritical hubbub that acccompanied the displaying of the not sensational mechanical solids, spirals, etc.

Again the program, "Under the general title *Horizons* this is the first cycle of a suite built on the theme of Exploration and Discovery. While not specifically American, these dances are built on themes abstracted from the American background."

Horizons divides itself into four segments, *a. Migration—New Trails, b. Dominion—Sanctified Power, c. Building Motif—Homesteading, d. Dance of Rejoicing,* and was evidently built on the concept of the first migrations from Asia, west to the American continent, settlement and thanksgiving. Throughout the cycle the dominant note was oriental, still, contemplative, restrained; the exuberant qualities of the more recent Graham compositions strangely lacking, a new sentient warmth pervaded; especially was this true of *Building Motif.* Strangely comparable to *Frontier,* it is what might be conceived the oriental counterpart to the earlier occidental composition of possession.

Frontier is pragmatic, uncompromising, almost greedy—this is mine; *Building Motif* is of a softer texture, the suggestion of a lullaby in the movement indicating the more gentle approach to work done—this is mine; how good it is. Possibly a matter of taste, the writer prefers the ideology of the latter composition; but it is nevertheless true that *Frontier* is a more commanding, better integrated and consequently more forceful composition.

Dance of Rejoicing, too, has its counterpart—*Celebration.* And here, too, the comparison (as of *Frontier* and *Building Motif*) holds. While *Dance of Rejoicing* has a certain fresh folk quality (apparently built on the Virginia Reel), and while it is possessed of an intensely restrained emotional quality, it lacks the pulse and the exciting rhythms of *Celebration.* Of course restraint may be as exciting and more exciting than volcanic action—and *Sarabande* is a case in point. But *Dominion* (*Sanctified Power*) is not as vigorously effective as *Imperial Gesture. Dominion,* reminiscent of the dance of the Japanese imperial army officer, the Samurai dance, lacks the directness of the *Imperial Gesture* and is more of the less pointed realms of the abstract idea.

This is all ,of course, a new direction for Martha Graham and recalling such developments in the past, there will be considerable change before the new trend is finally evaluated. However, the principle underlying the cycle *Horizons,* "themes abstracted from the American background," is not new in dance and your reviewer has taken occasion to comment on the issue before. He still believes that universals must result from particulars, art from the universalization of these same particulars in a definite social scheme.

Celebration (*Louis Horst*), *Sarabande* (*Lehman Engel*), *Frontier* (*Louis Horst*), *Imperial Gesture* (*Lehman Engel*) *and American Provincials—Act of Piety* and *Act of Judgment* (*Louis Horst*) were presented, and at the second concert with exceptional brilliance.

Louis Horst was at the piano and conducted a small ensemble of instruments and voice.

The music for *Horizons* was written by Louis Horst.

H. G.

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