S.F. "News." Mar. 31. 1936.

Martha Graham Dances Before 3000 Auditors

Ultra-Modern American Artist Wins Acclaim in S. F. Debut

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Martha Graham is an experience. Until last night she was but a legend to San Franciscans. Today, to some 3000 concert goers she is either the greatest of dancers or the most overestimated of artists. The few who may hold the latter opinion are probably the score of individuals who left the War Memorial Opera House before Miss Graham had concluded her program. Those who remained, seemed to describe the occasion, unanimously, as "interesting." A verdict with which this reviewer heartily concurs.

Martha Graham is Martha Graham. Her work is unique. It is ultramodern art, expressed mostly in linear movement, straight lines and angles, with only now and then a curve. Every fibre of her being, including her hair, plays a definite part in projecting her dance concepts. Her work sometimes suggests a remote kinship with Angna Enters'; her technique, with that of Mary Wigman. But the resultant feeling is entirely different.

American Idioms

In her opening number, "Praeludium," a dance of greeting, Miss Graham definitely projected the American tempo and architectural spatial patterns that belong essentially to the American scene. It was the number in which, for this auditor at least, Miss Graham most completely accomplished her oft-stated aim. It aso revealed an outstanding Graham characteristic: An elasticity of movement of the left leg, originating at the hip, which made a flexibility and specific space pattern never attempted by the right.

In "Frontier-American Perspective of the Plains" the feeling was also quite definitely American. It made a striking stage picture, with two white cords hung from the wings to center stage, adding effective perspectives to the scene. Breadth of pattern, design and pantomime contributed to the desired effect of spaciousness. It also projected a definite mood.

Moods Expressed

As a matter of fact, all of her dances expressed recognizable moods in terms of motion, even if in some cases the dance seemed as intangible as some moods seem inexplicable.

Three humorous offerings were to be listed as gems: "Satyric Festival Song," with a delightfully whimsical accompaniment for wood-wind by Imre Weisshaus, and the two satiric dances of the Harlequinade, "Pessimist" and "Optimist," with which her program ended. Auditors shouted "Encore"! But in vain. One wished for more of such sparkling humor and a bit less of the tragic and abstract.

Mention should also be made of "Act of Piety"—a presentation of stoic determination said to be Puritanic.

It is a high compliment to Miss Graham to state that she so fascinated the eye and intellect that it was quite impossible to be analytically conscious of the music played. One was conscious only of varied instrumentation and a sense of rightness. Which is also a tribute to the composers and the instrumentalists directed by Louis Horst.