

Miss Graham Presents Dance Recital

By ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN

One principle seems to underlie the dance of Martha Graham, who gave her first local recital last night at the Memorial Opera House. It is a complete, thorough-going consecration to the dance as an end in itself, to movement in the abstract emerging out of its established traditions to create a language of its own. And, as is always the case when an artist creates a new language of art, it is not immediately intelligible in all its aspects and directions. Wherefore some will assume that the unintelligibility is the fault of the artist. Others, more experienced and judicious in these matters, may be willing to admit that when something newly revealed is not instantly perceptible, it is the perception of the consumer that may be to blame.

Ever since the first critic chiseled the first review on a block of stone, the strange and unexperienced has been confused with the grotesque and the sinister. This impression of the sinister ran all through Miss Graham's recital, because of the gaunt, angular line and the grim tragic atmosphere that pervaded even the humorous dances. This may be purely the result of unfamiliarity. And it may persist even when the idiom becomes as common as that of the ballet.

PANTOMIME FACTOR

That Miss Graham is a technician to whom no problem of muscular movement exists cannot be argued. That her dances are completely composed, as logically developed from premise through proof to conclusion is equally obvious. Even her burlesques of the dance are creations, depending for their hilarity upon choreographic action rather than upon the accident and the extraneous gesture as is usually the case.

Pantomime entered also into the picture, particularly in two dances on American subjects. "Act of Piety" was a drama of ascetic worship. "Frontier" exploited a rather unreal conception of its subject, suggesting confirmation of Ford Madox Ford's dictum that New York is not America. But it was not the pantomime dances, but the more abstract composition that interested one most.

The dance can reach out for a pure mathematics of movement like the linear counterpoint of modern music or the abstraction of some modern painters. But the human body is always a lyric thing, and this Miss Graham does not deny. Her dance weaves its patterns on the air, but their power comes from the lyric conception, even if it be a somewhat over-emotional lyric

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conception, basic to the action.

METRIC ACCENTS

A whole chapter might be written about the artist's use of music. Sometimes, in the customary fashion, it underlines the dance with metric accents. Sometimes it seems to act as an element of counter-statement, balancing the dance. Often it simply supplies a diffused, static atmosphere of sound, a simple curtain of tone to be played against.

One sensed at times a certain self-consciousness, a certain ascetic prejudice against the tender and the gracious impelled, perhaps, by a desire to avoid romanticism which is as romantic as the thing it protests. But above all one felt a wealth of ideas, a conviction and strength and positiveness of purpose, and a sureness of direction on new paths that conquered one's objections and overrode one's occasional momentary bewilderment.