

# BIG AUDIENCE WONDERS AT 'NEW DANCE'

By MARIE HICKS DAVIDSON

Martha Graham, by her own assertion, represents the "American" dance, as distinguished from the Greek, German, Oriental or other sectional idioms.

Judged from her performance last night at the Opera House, where a goodly part of a large audience wondered what it was all about, the "American" dance is angularity, pantomime, setting-up exercises done to music moderne, choreography gone geometric and—since we are being "American"—we'll use a good old American term, "hay-wire."

Dancing must be spontaneous, joyful, free as the winds and waves and birds and bees.

Miss Graham's art is studied, and always she appears to want to "express" something. But even her expressions are not idyllic. They are arty and self-conscious.

She has set out, it would appear, to be different and modern and startling, to visualize this American scene with nothing more than a series of staccato jumps and weird rotary movements of arms and legs, especially the left leg, neck and hair.

Facial expression she uses but scantily. Draperies she depends largely upon, and lighting effects as well. The music was furnished by one piano and several percussion instruments.

With these, against a background of dark blue velour, with but a "prop" or two—as in the "Frontier" dance, in which she attitudinized against a section of rail fence—Miss Graham gave

eleven short dances, all in the same style, all emotionally of one piece. Or rather, without emotion, motivated by cerebration with little apparent sincerity. At no time was the spectator indrawn to the spectacle, as in truly great art.

Perhaps some will say that the reason for this lack of rapport was the newness of the art form being presented.

To itemize: "Lamentation" was done by Miss Graham, somber in gray and lavender, seated. She moved from the waist up, using the well known gestures of sorrow and dejection and grief. A study in cubism. Arid of deep feeling.

"Frontier" was, on the other hand, a study in spaciousness, a visual challenge to one's sense of dimension.

"Sarabande," in long white robe, was exactly like madame's reducing exercises in the morning, a gavotte danced horizontally.

In "Satyric Festival Song," to music which sounded like a steam radiator out of order, Miss Graham simply cavorted about the stage.

"Act of Piety" was a stark representation of Puritan fanaticism, in which the subject refuses to make compromise with any of the external urgencies which beset her.

And so on.

Miss Graham has, we can discern, done what she set out to do, for which she deserves credit. But many will dispute her assumption that she, as a one-woman show, has epitomized the American dance. To be the interpreter of an era one must be above it. Miss Graham has not risen above it, for she is completely immersed in its idiosyncrasies rather than its essence.

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