"New Masses."
Jan. 12. 1937.

THE DANCE

MARTHA GRAHAM'S *Chronicle* follows the tradition of *Imperial Gesture.* It is a brilliantly ambitious choreographic development that has for its subject matter the imperialist World War and a *Prelude to Action.*

The composition traces in three major movements — *Dances Before Catastrophe, Dances After Catastrophe,* and the *Prelude to Action*—the ugly logic of imperialism: the need for conquest, the inevitability of conflict resulting, the brutality of the conflict, the unavoidable unmasking of the rooted evil, and the approach of the masses to a logical conclusion.

The patterns are abstract; there is no miming. Program notes might clarify and save the audience the need to puzzle over subtleties in meaning, of intention. But although the ideas of the dancer are obscured in the overabundance of choreographic movement, the emotional overtones carry through, and with them the meaning of the composition and its significance.

In "Spectre—1914" the first of the *Dances Before Catastrophe,* the simple dipping into the red cascade of the skirt that the dancer wears is enough to recall all the brutalizations of imperial conquest. It is a less satirical, more savage *Imperial Gesture* that moves slowly but ravishes well and gluttonously. "Masque," the second dance of the first section, develops the hypocritical face of imperialism which cannot hide the under-currents, the hatred, the greed and the violence of imperialist antagonists.

Dances After Catastrophe are two. The first, "Steps in the Street"—the marching of men without cause, without direction, self-destroying—is a movement that is at once a dance of despair, death, and mourning. The second, "Tragic Holiday—In Memoriam," is the charlatan attempt to mask the memory of the imperialist conflict (as England does with its lions in Trafalgar Square, as we do with the gilded General Sherman in The Plaza). But the war memorials rise against the hypocrisy of the patrioteer and reveal that not the glory but the death is to be remembered.

Prelude to Action is a restrained, taut dance of gathering energies, gathering forces. There is no goal marked, but following the *Catastrophe* the direction is plain. Right now there is a massing of strength; there must be no repetition of "Steps in the Street!"

One might ask for simpler statement from the dancer, and with some justice, but not for statement more direct. The dance is principally an art of visual motion, not of literature. What speech the dancer wishes to convey must come through movement, not placards. There are difficulties, and Martha Graham does not surmount them all; she is obviously wary of the obvious—and perhaps to a fault. However, for sheer artistry of movement, for brilliance of choreography, for the rush and force of energy there is little on the concert stage to equal "Masque," "Steps in the Street," "Tragic Holiday—In Memoriam" or *Prelude to Action.*

And Wallingford Riegger's music for the composition, its understanding of the text, its excellent foreshadowing of the choreography (listen to the drums in the first part of "Masque") help no little the integrity of the work. The *décor* provided by Isamu Noguchi is simple and well done, as was the conducting of the music ensemble by Louis Horst.

When this review appears, Martha Graham and her group (which performed excellently) will be off the boards. Popular request should demand further performance. *Chronicle* undoubtedly is the most important work of the current season.

OWEN BURKE.