

By JOSEPH ARNOLD KAYE

MARTHA GRAHAM & GROUP. Carnegie Hall, N. Y. Oct. 9. Mgt. Frances Hawkins. Musical Director, Louis Horst. Auspices, New Masses.

This first event of the season featured *American Document*, which had its premiere at Bennington last summer. Other compositions were *Frontier* and *Imperial Gesture*. It is useful to note that both now have subtitles. The first is described as "American Perspective of the Plains," the second as "A Study in Arrogance."

The writer's original impression that *American Document* is a truly important work was confirmed. Through its use of explanatory devices, through its adoption of a definite scenario, through Miss Graham's clear intention of thoroughly explaining to the onlooker what she means to express, it marks a profound change in the modern dance.

No longer does Martha Graham take the aloof attitude that the spectator, like the listener to abstract music, does not need to concern himself with the literal meaning of her compositions; She now wants the spectator to get a thoroughly realistic conception of what she has composed.

This is completely to the advantage of the modern dance. If there is a title to a dance composition the composition must, in every way possible, follow the implications of that title. Dance is not music, and unless the dancer actually wishes to create an abstract piece the spectator must know what the dance composer is up to.

The great advantage of this departure is that dancers, will begin to ask themselves: "Do these movements that I have devised really express what I want them to express? Does the spectator get out of my work what I want him to get out of it?"

Such analyses are bound to lead to some revolutionary conclusions.

In considering *American Document* as it was performed in Carnegie Hall, it becomes acutely clear that a dance theatre is imperative. The composition lost a great deal by being performed on a platform like that of Carnegie Hall. The ordinary theatrical stage is only a slight improvement on the concert hall. The dance requires an auditorium and performing space particularly adapted to its needs. When Arch Lauterer staged *Trend* for Hanya Holm on an inclined plane, and when Miss Holm restricted her audience to the balconies, a move in the right direction was made. The difference between that performance of *Trend* and the one given later in the Center Theatre, on a "normal" stage, and with the audience seated on the orchestra floor, was tremendous.

Somehow, dancers ought to find means of creating a dance theatre. There are enough

concerts during a season to make such an auditorium a feasible project.

To unbiased minds the Carnegie Hall *American Document* brought home the fact that a composition of such dimensions and purpose needs more than a background of curtains or a few arty props. *American Document*—and many other late modern dance productions—has the character of a spectacle, and spectacles should be treated with a proper regard for stagecraft. It is illogical for dancers to give the most scrupulous attention to costuming—as they do now—and be practically indifferent to proper scenic investiture. Without appropriate backgrounds and skillful lighting the best audience reaction cannot be obtained. Those who do not believe this are fooling themselves and retarding their art.

"Dance."  
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