

American Dance Play Impressive

BY ISABEL MORSE JONES

If you love America, see Martha Graham! Her "American Document" was performed for the first time in Los Angeles at the Philharmonic Auditorium last night. It is the fit culmination of 20 years' development. Truly Martha Graham ranks now in succession with Isadora Duncan, Maud Allan and Ruth St. Denis. But she is going beyond them by projecting her cerebral choreography through young dancers, an interlocutor and sparse but effective properties. She has added the arts of the theater to abstraction and is getting audience reaction not to be had in the beginning of her career.

HERITAGE FELT

The "American Document" was, of course, the most important offering because it contains her heritage, the past of all born in America.

"Sarabande," with its stiff draperies and its satirical comment on form and ceremony, danced by Miss Graham in oyster white, is nevertheless impressive because it is ritualistic. "Deep Song" has a rigid endurance of excruciating pain that sears your soul. It is a picture of agony, unforgettable.

"Frontier" has been done here several times but each time it gives you new horizons. The long white ropes which Miss Graham uses for eye condensation serve to de-limit the stage. Thought goes beyond them to her indications of infinity.

MODERN SIGNIFICANCE

"American Document" is more than a dance. It is an epic in space. The company of young women and two men principals performing with Miss Graham translate history into modern dance-language. The action is swift, the comment pointed and it has the restraint of fine art. The costumes are appropriate to the subjects but markedly simple—and the colors are clear. The music by Ray Green is like good film-music . . . you have to stop thinking about the action to hear it and still it is necessary and important because of its rhythmic and percussive emphasis.

Houseley Stevens Jr. speaks the fateful words of Walt Whitman, of the Declaration of Independence, of the Bible's Song of Songs, of Lincoln and of Indians and Puritans. They are

thrilling words and the way this young man flings them up to high places makes one proud to be an American.

DISTURBING SEQUEL

There is an air of righteousness about "American Document" that is strangely upset by "The After Piece" with its implication of responsibility unshouldered today. It is a challenge, a disturbing aftermath that sends one home with facts to think upon.

So there you have it . . . a dance-pantomime-play with history, beauty, compelling action and American moralizing to it.

The large audience gave Miss Graham, her trained and magnificent-gestured partner, Erick Hawkins from the "Ballet Caravan," and her own company with pianist-composer Louis Horst, a long ovation.

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