

# Martha Graham Puzzles But Delights Audience In Dances

By JOSEPH H. WEINTRAUB

Martha Graham Dance Group appeared Tuesday night at the Senior High School in the final event of the winter series sponsored by the Atlantic City Teachers' Association.

That Miss Graham is just about the most provocative dancer on the American—or any other—stage can be attested to by the audience of some 1500. There were as many reactions as there were individuals.

## Symbolism Stressed

It was apparent throughout the program she presented that Miss Graham leans heavily on symbolism and insists on making the audience take part—not by sitting back and merely being entertained—but by a constant mental effort to interpret

and understand the various dance movements.

Remarks at the intermission and as the audience left the auditorium left but one conclusion. Those who witnessed the performance were forced to think.

That it didn't always understand was as freely expressed as the sheer delight evoked by "Every Soul is a Circus" and the superb closing number, "American Document." The latter especially was made more understandable through the clever but unobtrusive use of an interlocutor, an assignment capably handled by Houseley Stevens Jr.

The costuming in all numbers was colorful. The few stage properties

found necessary were most effective. But it is on the mentality of the beholder that Miss Graham makes her greatest demand.

## Scarf Dance Effective

In the opening dance, "Columbiad," Miss Graham made effective use of two scarves, one red, the other blue, against the background of a gown of unbroken white.

"Every Soul a Circus," as a program note explained, was not the literal world of canvas and sawdust ring but the rather troubled mind of every woman, filled with ridiculous situations and silly behavior that result from her desire to be the apex of an "eternal triangle."

During its progress, Miss Graham

displayed a distinct but much too infrequent flair for comedy. With her in principal roles which contributed heavily to the success of this psychologic study that sometimes bordered on the psychopathic were Erick Hawkins and Mercier Cunningham.

"Frontier" was a brief interlude portraying an American perspective of the plains in which Miss Graham appeared alone.

It remained for "American Document" to score the greatest honors on the program with the entire group contributing uniformly high performances. It was presented on a stage entirely devoid of a single "prop."

It was patterned freely after an American minstrel show, according to the program, but other than labeling the vocal announcements as coming from an interlocutor, there was far more historical pageantry than minstrelry.

Vividly portrayed were the confusing elements of various nationalities represented among our early settlers with the subsequent unity arising from the desire to be a nation with its ultimate declaration of independence.

These were followed by more historical episodes dealing with the winning of the land from the Indians, the austere period of the Puritans and Emancipation of the Civil War. The modern note was struck in The After Piece, brought down to 1940.

The commentaries contributed by Stevens as interlocutor were taken from historical documents and writings which included the Declaration of Independence, a letter written in 1811 by Red Jacket of the Senecas, sermons of Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Walt Whitman's Poems.

Forming the dance group in addition to the principals already mentioned were: Marjorie Mazia, who once attended resort schools, JaJne Dudley, Jean Erdman, Nelle Fisher, Frieda Flier, Nina Fonaroff, Elizabeth Halpern and Sophie Maslow. Louis Horst was the musical director.

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