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Martha Graham Presents Repertory Dance Program

American Performer and Group in Characteristic Numbers

The third individual performance in the Dance Repertory Theater's initial season was given by Martha Graham and her group last evening at the Maxine Elliott Theater, and provided a memorable experience for admirers of this dancer's tense and acid art.

It requires a definite type of mind and a peculiar slant of artistic enthusiasm to find in Miss Graham the great prophet and white hope of the American dance stage. Apparently, however, there are many such, for the theater was well filled for a mid-week recital, and the applause had that hysterical quality which expresses both wonder and awe. Miss Graham is, unquestionably, one of our major personalities and possesses several convincing attributes of the authentic genius. She is definitely and uniquely a creator; she has evolved for herself and for her group a plastic speech so stylized, so completely original and incisive that were one to meet a Graham pupil in the desert wastes or the Arctic wilderness, she would be as recognizable as if placarded.

It is a neurotic, grim, sardonic sort of grotesquerie which colors all her work, and the stabbing wit which enlivens her most beguiling masterpieces has the faint tinge of conscious madness which both fascinates and repels. Her technique, developed to a fine line for her own unique purposes, is, of course, flawless, and her physical presentation, the outrageous and absolutely characteristic design of her costumes, the music which she selects for her dances, are all of one feeling; there is no jarring note.

Last evening's program included many of the best of her familiar numbers such as "Immigrant," the famous "Insincerities," the superlative "Adolescence," the inimitable Horst "Fragments" and the stirring "Heretic," in which she appears with her group.

These extraordinary pupils, whose work is keyed to the pulse of their teacher and is created in her image, also appeared in their "Sketches From the People" of last year and two new numbers. The first of these, "Prelude to a Dance" (Counterpoint No. 1), by Honegger, was a masterpiece of costume, grouping, rhythm and style; the second, substituted for Carl Ruggles's "Portals," was "A Project in Movement, for a Divine Comedy," without music, a fine, spiritually conceived and suggested design which we shall hope to see often and study at greater length.

Miss Graham's own new solo numbers were "Two Chants; Futility, and Ecstatic Song," successful projections in her standard vein; a fine, sculptural "Lamentation" by Kodaly and, most successful of all, a "Harlequinade" by Toch, divided characteristically into "Pessimist" and "Optimist" and displaying the Graham art at its scintillating best, both penetrating and disarming.

M. W.