

WITH THE DANCERS

By MARY F. WATKINS

IT WOULD have been clairvoyant to foresee that an article deferred to a second Sunday after the opening of Radio City Music Hall would already be too late. But such is actually the case, and as these words are type already a change in policy has been announced by the chiefs of R. K. O., and the Music Hall as such is no more. Pictures and stage productions will move in at the earliest possible date, and the high hopes of the dance world pinned to Martha Graham and Harald Kreutzberg's connection with the gigantic enterprise have been dashed to subway level.

The Music Hall's spectacularly brief career then can only serve as the subject of a post-mortem today, a process less tragic than might be supposed. In fact, there are cheerier aspects to the debacle than there might have been if matters had continued as they were on the night of December 27 last.

One Redeeming Feature

Any review of the ill-fated show would at this time be stale and gratuitous, for much ink has been spilled in the cause during the last ten days and nights, but at no time can it be too late to speak with admiration of that one moment when the new and augmented ballet corps, in its pristine tulle and frothy wigs gathered across the vast stage in one curving line of beauty and revealed in a fleeting and soon dissipated instant just what might be the possibilities of the new project. The gleaming white ranks against the severity of the silver and black back-drop, in that moment of pose before the dance began, is the most treasurable memory brought away from an experience quite, well, otherwise.

Mr. Kreutzberg, whose engagement, for all we have been informed to the contrary, may continue under the newer policy, was introduced as the choreographic piece de resistance on Part I of the original program, in a pretentious number called "The Angel of Fate." This subject, we presume, was chosen for its relation to those two dances which won fame and honors for the Viennese artist in his recital tours of this country, his startling "Angel of the Last Judgment" and his most spiritual and sensitive "Angel of the Annunciation."

Blight of Luxury

In so far as it was possible to see the forest for the trees, Mr. Kreutzberg's own work is still without a peer; his dances with unparalleled mastery and distinction. But in the Music Hall production there were too many celestial stairs, too much artistic lighting, too large and glittering a cloak, too much scenario to the piece, to permit even an artist of Mr. Kreutzberg's caliber to emerge triumphant. He became but part of a spectacle which might easily have been omitted and never missed from a bill keyed to please ill-assorted thousands, and therein lies his entire misfortune. Mr.

Rothafel cannot be criticized for engaging him, for it was a logical choice. Kreutzberg's work, although modernistic in trend, has always been colored by a vivid sense of the theater, and his methods are direct, his results pictorial and not too abstract in their message. Those who have the future interests of the dance at heart felt calm and confident about what he could do for Roxy, but, alas, they did not quite provision what Roxy might do to him.

Miss Graham's Mission

The case of Martha Graham is even more lamentable. It was a bold stroke of the pen, indeed, which signed this uncompromising Cenobite of the dance for a turn on the vaudeville stage. She has a large following which can be depended on to fill a Sunday afternoon theater with cries of rapture. But it is safe to suppose that in a year's time very few laymen find their way into this audience more than once, and that practically no potential members of a Roxy public are among them. Roxy's faith in her was touching but vague. Was she supposed to throw the rest of the bill out of balance and convert 6,000 people at a sitting to baffling but always impressive dogma? Or was the luxury and elegance of her setting supposed to draw the teeth of her bite and leave her tamed and popularized?

In all events, her place on the tail of a bill which was only exceeded in dimensions by the magnitude of the theater in which it was played was not conducive to success in either direction. Those who stayed at all until the eighteenth number, which was Miss Graham's uncompromising "Choric Dance for an Antique Greek Tragedy," found themselves satiated to a point of indifference as to whether the performer were Miss Graham or Ray Bolger, or both together in a pas de deux. The few who were awake and in a condition to receive impressions were certainly in no mood to derive either pleasure or profit from anything which put even the lightest strain upon the intellect, if any.

Hence the expulsion of Miss Graham and her devoted group upon the toe of somebody's boot last Saturday week was not unexpected, even if the manner of it, to an uninformed outsider, may have seemed somewhat brusque. The theory of having something to please everybody in a theatrical bill would inevitably be a disastrous one, when raised to the monster proportions of the Radio City Music Hall. Assuredly the simplest child would be

able to perceive that if you liked the Roxyettes, you would only tolerate Kreutzberg and heartily detest Graham, while if Graham was your enthusiasm, the Roxyettes would produce in you acute distress. This seesaw of pleasure and pain is not good for an audience and will not bring it back again.

Out of the Wreckage

On the whole Miss Graham is probably well out of a frame which could scarcely, under the best circumstances have been becoming, and it is to be hoped that Mr. Kreutzberg will find opportunity in the promised stage productions under the

new policy to create ballets comparable to his achievements in this direction abroad. As for Patsy Bowman and the big corps de ballet, a happy home surrounded by admiration and affection is assured them in any event.

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