DANCE OBBLIGATO IN NEW PLAY AT CENTER

"Iron Flowers," Unusual Production By Itself, Combines the Arts, in Biberman's Second Offering.

By COURTENAY SAVAGE

In announcing his season at the County Center, Herbert Biberman promised that it would be an adventure in the theatre. His production of "Peace Palace" was definitely that, and "Iron Flowers," the second offering of his season, goes beyond the realm of adventure into that of discovery, for Mr. Biberman, assisted by Martha Graham, has united the art of the spoken word with that of the dance. Music as an emotional background for a scene in a play is no novelty, of course, but, unless I am mistaken, this is the first time that dancing has been an obbligato to a serious drama.

The effect is sometimes weirdly fascinating, sometimes distracting. As an introduction to the mood of a scene, or a character, I can well imagine that dancing may become a part of dramatic art. Whether it will be used all through a play, as it was last night, is a question. Personally I would think not, for it seemed that the dance fitted best into such moments as when characters first moved across the stage, or into the interludes when they were able to keep the audience under the spell of emotional qualities of the preceding scenes.

This innovation of welding the dance and the drama will be criticized—there were some last night who talked of a three-ring circus—but then, every innovation in music, art, or the drama has been called ridiculous by those whose ideas are not elastic enough to know that only through growth can any art continue to live. Perhaps when we have seen further examples of this new technique we will have a better idea of its scope or limitations. Like everything else new, it needs to be considered carefully before a real criticism can be made. Miss Martha Graham, who is responsible for the dances has made her contribution to the new art one of her most satisfactory achievements. She has used a group, and two excellent solo dancers, and, especially in the dances arranged for the interludes in the first and second acts, she has achieved emotions and beauty through her motifs. If Tashamira and Jerome Andrews, the solo dancers, seem more effective than the group, it is because they more closely typified the man and the girl around whom the story of the play itself revolves.

This play, like the dancing, will be a subject of great controversy. There are some who will roundly condemn its subject, who will be shocked, and say that such a subject does not belong in the theater—but contrary to any such criticism, "Iron Flowers" is an important play, mirroring as it does a phase of life that is as much a problem of our social existence as any other of the subjects which are daily newspaper copy.

Briefly, it tells of the clandestine love of a young married man and a girl, with the usual complications. It is treated quite sanely, and frankly, as a similar complication would be treated in real life, and, if you insist in a moral there is one, for in the most sincerely written, and best acted scene in the play, the girl decides that what they have done has killed her love, and she never wishes to see the young man again. As the doctor points out in his scene, we always pay greatly for our sins.

This drama has been cast and directed by Mr. Biberman, with the honors probably going to John Bukler as the young man, though that is largely because his role allowed him greater scope than any of the others. Gale Sondergaard was the girl, and brought to the part a sincerity that lent great charm and conviction to a role that might easily have been overacted. Ann Mason gave a charming performance as the wife, Montague Love, Charles Jordan and Edward Fielding were also in the cast.

The settings, by Dean Dietrich, were excellent.

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