Friday, February 16, 1940

Betty Carper's Group Wins Approval in Dance Program

By Edith Lindeman

The most unusual dance concert ever given in Richmond took place upon the Lyric stage last night when Betty Carper and her group presented Martha Graham and her dancers in a joint offering of the ultra-modern dance.

The recital was unique in that Miss Carper and her girls are striving toward the goal which Martha Graham and her dancers already have attained. Miss Carper, herself a soloist of great ability, has welded her 17 young girls into a smoothly functioning whole. Since some of them have had less than a year's instruction, the results displayed in last night's performance were nothing short of astonishing.

Local dance enthusiasts can feel that the first half of the program is another expression of indigenous art, for Miss Carper, and her choreographer, Muriel Appel, are Richmonders, and much of the music is from the pen of George Harris, Richmond musician and critic, who also served as accompanist for Miss Carper's portion of the evening.

The group consisted of Margaret Crabtree, Dimple Laytham, Marion Rawles, Aida Christiansen, Caroline Doyle, Helen Smith, Bernice Stephenson, Mary Elizabeth Riley, Lucy Baird, Jean Bowers, Lucy McDonough, Margaret Purcell, Elsie Satterwhite, Nancy Davis, Frances DeBoe, Allie Cooper, and Frances Calisch.

Martha Graham, generally acclaimed the first and last word in the world of the modern dance, not only acted as guest soloist, but also brought to Richmond her latest dance satire, "Every Soul is a Circus" for which she requires the support of eight other dancers. This burlesque on the life of a shallow woman displays admirably the present trend of the modern dance. Whereas, up to now, the main currents of motion have been strong and stark, a newer movement provides whimsy, comedy and outright farce. Martha Graham, depicting the "silly woman," is a combination of Bea Lillie and Charlotte Greenwood, plus a great deal of the technical genius that is Martha Graham.

Like most of the audience last night, I do not pretend to understand all there is to know about the modern dance. It is strange, new, sometimes repellant, never pretty, but always memorable. Miss Carper in her "American Suite" and Miss Graham in "Frontier" aimed to put ideas, thoughts and abstractions into dance forms. To the intelligentsia of the dance world, these forms are utterly lucid. To many others, they are a little "queer," but oddly fascinating.

On the other hand, there is comprehensible grace and sweetness in Betty Carper's Brahms' Variations, and stark, poignant, simple tragedy in "The Idiot"; while Miss Graham's "Every Soul is a Circus" is a riot of sly humor and understandable movement.

The concert last night was given for the financial benefit of the Virginia Chapter of the American Physiotherapy Association. Incidentally, it proved of benefit to the curious dance-minded audience, who soaked up a liberal education in two hours with the modern dance.

Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch.