

By GIA KOURLAS

Martha Graham Like You've Never Seen Him

RICHARD MOVE plays Martha Graham big. At 6-foot-4, he is at least a foot taller than the diminutive Graham (and his mountainous bun adds even more inches). Yet armed with great style and a makeup brush, Mr. Move has brought the mother of modern dance back to life.

Barring the occasional benefit, it has been more than three years since Mr. Move's poignant, meticulously researched and hilarious interpretation of Ms. Graham has graced a New York stage. On Thursday, "Martha @," the variety show that originated in 1996 at Mother, a meat-packing district club that has since closed, relocates to the Jane Street Theater for a new installment featuring the guest artists Lar Lubovitch, Isaac Mizrahi, Stuart Hodes and Julie Atlas Muz. As always, Mr. Move plays Graham — both a genial and irritable

**Graham was always
larger than life.**

**Now she's back as a
6-foot-4 man.**

hostess whom he aptly captures through versions of her dances, monologues taken from her writing and stories passed along by former dancers and friends.

"I think he's blackly funny," Mr. Mizrahi said. "He's always got a tongue in his cheek, but because he's such an earnest fellow himself, it always comes out without air quotes. He's not parodying anything, because he has such range and such beauty."

Sitting in his West Village loft, Mr. Move considered his subject. "I think she'll have more to talk about than ever," he said. "I want to address her absence in New York. I want to address her experiences in film. You know, Paramount offered her an extraordinary amount of money to make her life story starring Cyd Charisse. She said: 'No thank you. I can ruin my own reputation in five minutes.'"

Graham, who died in 1991, left behind delicious fodder for a drag performer like Mr. Move. With fine comic timing and unwavering concentration, Mr. Move is a terrific actor who most recently returned from New Mexico, where he portrayed another Martha (the boozier made famous by Elizabeth Taylor) in an otherwise straightforward production of Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

For the film director Stephen Daldry, who has known Mr. Move for years, it was always clear that he was an incredible actor with or without the wig. "The wonderful thing about Richard's performance as Martha is that it totally transcends the genre," Mr. Daldry said. "He manages to make a piece of work that totally upsets all

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your preconceptions about drag. Although there's great comedy in it, he's actually doing something else: It's a serious and intellectual exercise."

Mr. Move, who refuses to give his age ("A lady never tells," he said in his falsetto Graham voice), is also a serious choreographer. He directed "Move-Opolis!," a nonstop four-hour show in Lille, France, that featured 16 Greco-Roman wrestlers. "It was my version of a circus," Mr. Move said. "It took place in an old airplane hanger." His full-evening work for Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, "The Show (Achilles Heels)," a modern staging of the Greek myth, will be

presented by the Baryshnikov Dance Foundation during its forthcoming tour.

But even with such steady outside work, Mr. Move says he will never abandon Martha. He stars as Graham in "Ghostlight," an independent film directed by Christopher Herrmann that opens at the Pioneer Theater on June 23, and he has written a play with Lisa Kron that features his one-man portrayal of Graham.

Since his last presentation of "Martha @" in 2001 at Town Hall, he has taken the show on the road to cities as varied as Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Rome, where he delivered his monologues in fluent Italian. "We came up

Richard Move as himself, below, and as Martha Graham in "Martha @," which returns to New York this week.

with an incredibly right translation that included verb tenses that were no longer used," Mr. Move said, "but might have been spoken by a rather extremely eccentric well-educated woman 50 years ago."

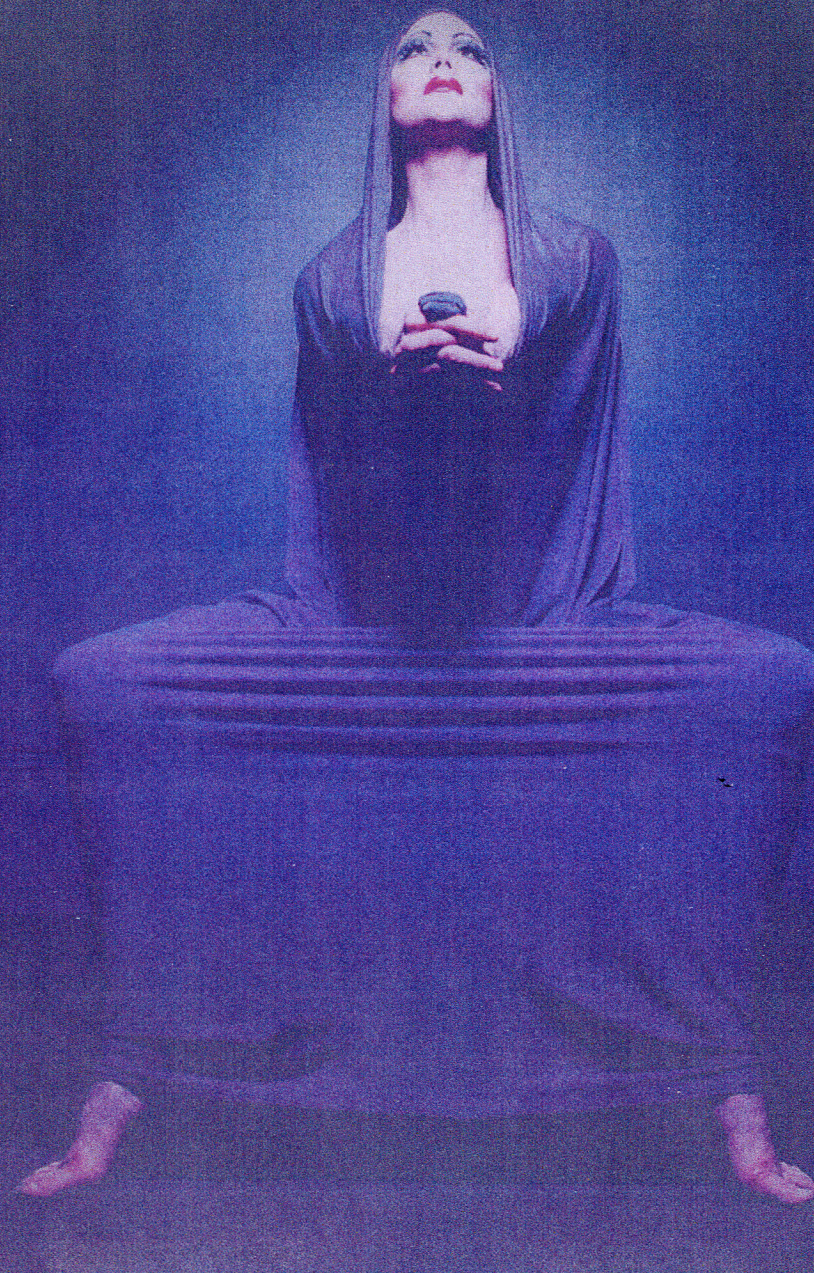
The show's absence in New York was largely related to money issues; the cost of self-producing, he said, was exorbitant. Though he had been invited to appear at many of New York's dance theaters, Mr. Move said, he felt that presenting the series in a conventional space would tamper with the show's inherent magic. "I had this idea to keep 'Martha' in special environments and out of the dance-company model of having a New York season once a year and all the infrastructure that goes with that," he said. "I wanted her to appear like she did all those years in a special and unusual way."

He cautioned that fans of the show, especially in its early days, might notice a change in Martha's general mood. "Her vulnerability and her fear are more present now," he said. "The humor is still there. I want to send up things when it's appropriate, but I feel like her loneliness has entered the picture a little more. But it's just as loving. You can't not love a subject you've dedicated this much time to. It's impossible."

Mr. Move, who grew up in rural Virginia, is just as striking without his makeup. Finely arched brows and a halo of streaky blond hair frame his wide, angelic face; despite his large frame, he is a picture of graceful refinement. Dangling from his right wrist is a chunky silver bracelet that he never removes; it was a present from the former Graham dancer Linda Hodes.

"Here's why boredom does not equal Martha Graham," he said. "I'll have a moment with Linda Hodes, and she'll pull out a beautiful piece of jewelry that Martha gave her and give it to me. I think she understands that I'll treasure it."

While Mr. Move avoids trivializing Graham's life, he is haunted by her in a dream. "I'm in the back of a cab driving up Park Avenue at night," he said. "We're moving along in an normal fashion, starting and stopping, and the taxi speeds up and runs lights. There's one near-collision after another, and then I feel a little gloved hand on mine, and I look over and it's Martha and she's smiling at me." Mr. Move roared with laughter. "And then I wake up. I have no idea what it means."



Josef Astor (above); Robin Holland (right)

