

Saturday Views



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THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Review *Dance*

Martha Graham reincarnated

By Marilyn Jackson
FOR THE INQUIRER

Not everyone admires the monumental choreographer Martha Graham's movement style and personality. Nevertheless, during a nearly six-decade career, her innovations and modernist style earned her a place as one of the most significant artists of the 20th century.

She did what artists are supposed to do: startle us and make us rethink the way we thought things ought to be. Moreover, she did it with courage and sureness. She was the right person for her time.

Now, that time is over, and her choreography looks dated or, as one audience member I overheard say at a Graham-based concert, "Positively Victorian!"

But in 1996, five scant years after her death, choreographer Richard Move reinvented her with his show *Martha @*. Thursday night at the Painted Bride, six members of his company

and special local guest artists accompanied him. The show opened with one of Charles Atlas' amusing film montages.

The lanky Move would have towered over Graham, yet his impersonation of her is brilliant and believable. His swank Graham-like gowns fit like opera gloves, and his flawless makeup is only slightly overdone. Although he wickedly caricatures Graham, he turns what could be a betrayal into a loving portrayal.

He introduces himself as "Martha," the mother of contemporary dance. As the show hilariously progresses, he delicately exposes Graham's brittle self-centeredness, making her seem more the "Mommy Dearest" of dance. Through his emcee monologue, the exaggerated costumes of his splendid dancers and his near-naked love slave, Reid Hutchins, Move pulls together an invaluable and entertaining historical record.

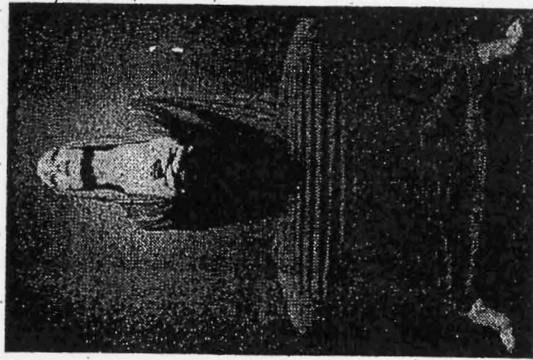
He touches on Graham's pro-

lific output — about 180 dances — that included works such as *Appalachian Spring* and *Lamentations*, which Move performed in an affectionate distillation.

In each city he tours, Move pulls in local dancers. Here, "Martha's" first guest was Akhila Vasthare, an authentic Bharathanatyam (an Indian classical dance form). Vasthare's ornate costume, warm connection to the audience, and intricate, stomping dance steps were in startling contrast to the severity and gravity of Graham's choreography, and even to Jeanne Ruddy's, lighthearted but insipid dance that followed.

A former principal dancer with Graham, Ruddy danced in '60s hip-huggers and an overstated duster to Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now."

Hip-hop artists Clyde Evans Jr. and Ron Wood pulled off the cheekiest moments of the evening with their spectacular flips and falls, splits and slides.



Richard Move impersonates Martha Graham in "Martha @" at the Painted Bride.

Paule Turner, as Medea, gave a sneak preview of *Medea: Love Is the Devil*, singing in hot pink curls and a red plaid kilt. If I must take it at all, I'll take my Graham cracked and reincarnated, like this.

Last performance tonight at 8 at the Painted Bride Art Center, 230 Vine St. Information: 215-925-9914.