

THE WEEKLY GUIDE

MARCH 3-9, 2005

# NIGHT & DAY



## FOR THE LOVE OF Martha

Choreographer-performer **Richard Move**  
pays tribute to legendary Martha Graham > **UP FRONT**

• SAGE FRANCIS: HIP-HOP'S  
UNDERGROUND HERO > **POP MUSIC**

• 'BE COOL,' TRAVOLTA IS BACK  
AS CHILI > **AT THE MOVIES**

• MARS VOLTA'S 'FRANCES  
THE MUTE' > **ALBUM REVIEWS**

# ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

'MARTHA@': GRAHAM EXPERT DELIVERS SHORTHAND  
VERSION OF CHOREOGRAPHER'S BEST WORKS

By Janice Steinberg

**N**EW YORK — Richard Move wasn't the first person to do a takeoff on Martha Graham. That honor belongs to Ziegfeld Follies star Fanny Brice, who called her 1935 spoof "Rewolt."

"It was inspired by the period of Martha's she called the 'long woolens' period that was all about women in revolt, basically," says Move, interviewed in his apartment 40 stories above midtown Manhattan.

Wearing a track suit and a multicolored knit cap, the 6-foot-4 Move looks nothing like the 5-foot-1 choreographer he'll impersonate at the Lyceum this weekend — until you notice his expressive eyes and the lithe grace of

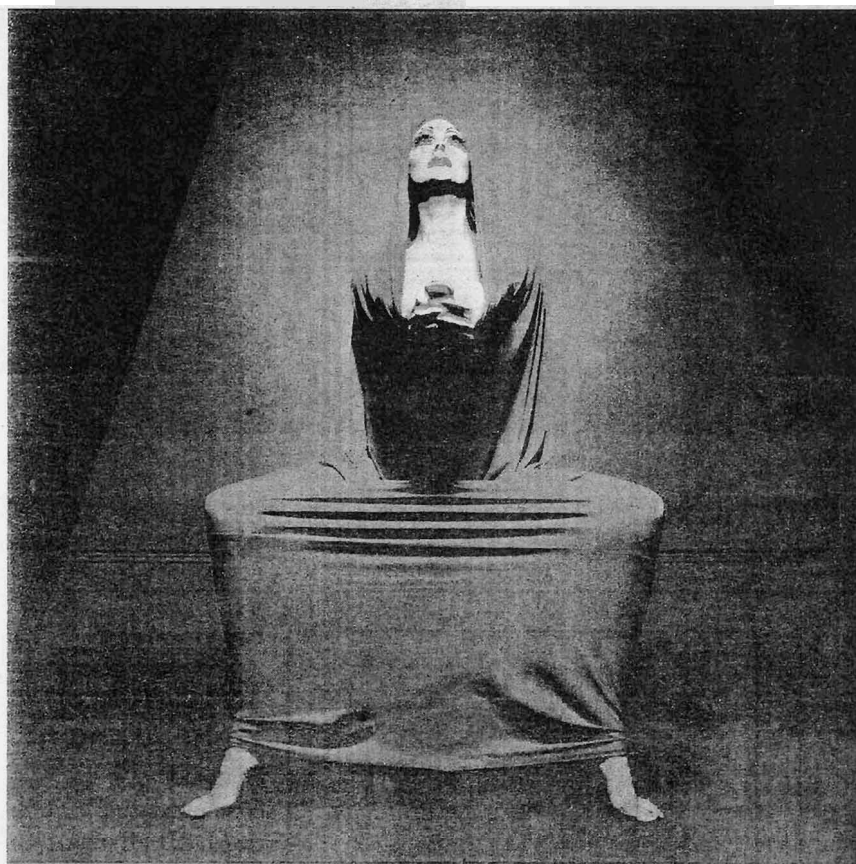
his gestures as he fixes a cup of tea and settles into a sofa covered with purple faux fur.

"Can you imagine what it must have been like to see Graham's 'Heretic' in the 1930s?" says Move, whose cabaret-style "Martha@" is being presented here — as is the Martha Graham Dance Company the following weekend — in the La Jolla Music Society's "American Movement" festival.

"It must have been extraordinary, but also extreme, and probably easier to satire then than now, because now of course we know it's great art and the dance equivalent of that period of modernism."

If Move sounds like a Graham scholar, it's

SEE Move, 6



"Playing with gender roles and perceptions is one of the final frontiers in terms of what can ruffle people's feathers," says Richard Move. *Josef Astor*



(Move's) focus in "Martha@" is on that "grande dame" personality ... and on Graham as a 20th-century cultural giant whose influence he feels is often not given its due. ...

## MOVE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

certainly not what he had in mind when he first donned the persona of the ultimate dance diva at a meat-packing district cabaret in the mid-1990s. "You know how people have five-year plans? I just wanted to get through the first show!"

A decade, two New York Dance and Performance (Bessie) Awards, and a film ("Ghostlight") later, however, Move has become a historian of the choreographer who performed her first original work in 1926 and left a legacy of 181 dances by the time of her death in 1991.

"From the first show, people started coming out of the woodwork to give me books, stories," he says. "(Things like) 'Did I ever tell you about the time Martha threw a jar of honey at me in the studio?'"

Move, in his mid- to late-30s ("A lady never tells her age!" he insists), has also received enough memorabilia to make his apartment a small but exquisite Graham museum. Showing a visitor around with Southern graciousness (he grew up in rural Virginia), he points out photographs of Graham with Gloria Swanson at Studio 54 and with Pope John Paul II, and another of Graham in full stage makeup hung in the bathroom next to a photo of a handsome young couple, Move's grandparents. (Also displayed in the bathroom is one of Isadora Duncan's scarves.)

A pencil drawing — of Graham dramatically posed in her stretchy "Lamentation" costume — could be the basis for a class in American dance history: The drawing was done by Kenneth Shopen at the groundbreaking Bennington (Vermont) School of the Dance, where Graham taught, and it was previously owned by choreographer Alwin Nikolais, who gave it to choreographer Murray Louis. Louis gave it to Move.

He performs "Lamentation," as well as several other classics, in "Martha@," although he's quick to describe his dancing as "Cliffs Notes" versions, for instance a four-minute distillation of a 25-minute dance. He always has an expert demonstrate Graham's signature, pelvic-centered technique. In San Diego, that will be Denise Vale, who was a principal with the Graham Company for 10 years.

Move also, in the cabaret spirit of the show, features local choreographers — he was delighted when a messenger came to the door with a video of work by Nancy McCaleb and Sadie Weinberg, which will be performed here.

Move's only live experience of Graham was seeing her take a bow after a performance by her company in the 1980s. Exposed to Graham technique in a high school performing arts mag-



Richard Move has been immersing himself in the persona of Martha Graham since the mid-1990s. *Josef Astor*

### DATEBOOK

#### "Martha@" starring Richard Move

8 tonight and tomorrow,  
7 and 10 p.m. Saturday, 3 and 7 p.m. Sunday  
Lyceum Space Theatre, Horton Plaza  
\$27-\$35  
(619) 544-1000

net, he was drawn to its "poetry and philosophy," but in college at Virginia Commonwealth University, he learned that she was considered passé. (The two former Graham dancers who became the leading choreographers of the next generation, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor, both actively rejected her theatricality.)

Move, however, was entranced by the "extreme, kooky, eccentric, magnetic person" he saw in the Graham film "Dancer's World." "I remember thinking, 'Who is that woman who is like this oracular priestess, goddess, mad religious leader?'"

His focus in "Martha@" is on that "grande dame" personality ... and on Graham as a 20th-century cultural gi-

ant whose influence he feels is often not given its due — for instance, her collaboration with Aaron Copland, who, on commission from Graham, composed the score for "Appalachian Spring," being performed here by the Graham Company and in Move's abridged form. (The "American Movement" festival celebrates both Copland and Graham.)

"People think Aaron Copland is more important than Martha Graham," Move says. "I want to explain to people that Martha said, 'Oh, Aaron, dear, do you know that old Quaker hymn, 'The Gift to Be Simple?'" He sings the first line of the hymn, which Copland wove through his Pulitzer Prize-winning composition. "Martha's the one who said, 'Let's use the Quaker theme.'"

Move's knowledge of and respect for Graham are what inspired Mary Lou Aleskie, president/CEO of the La Jolla Music Society, to include him in the "American Movement" Festival. (His show is being co-presented by LJMS and Sushi in collaboration with the San Diego Repertory Theatre.)

"I was so taken with Richard's ability to interpret with knowledge and passion, without his own personality being imposed on Martha," says Aleskie, who met Move last year through the Baryshnikov Foundation. (Mikhail Baryshnikov has been a strong supporter of Move's work.) "I thought he would be an important element in helping to illuminate Martha and her legacy."

LJMS is breaking new ground by making the first official connection between the Graham Company and Move, a relationship that at one time involved a "cease and desist" letter from the Graham Trust. He surely raised some hackles, as well, during the four years when the company didn't perform due to litigation over the ownership of Graham's work, which ironically left Move the one person representing her artistic legacy on stage.

Proud of afflicting the comfortable, Move feels it took several years of doing "Martha@" to understand why some people find it so disturbing. "I have felt that playing with gender roles and perceptions is one of the final frontiers in terms of what can ruffle people's feathers. I think it's the core of criticism of me and the show," he says.

"And the Martha show pushes even more buttons because unlike, say, the Dame Edna show or whatever, Martha is deeply sexual. Her work is deeply sexual, and it's sexual from a woman's point of view."

Along with ruffling feathers, "Martha@" has also opened doors for Move. Recent projects include starring as Graham in the film "Ghostlight," and choreographing the Amy Sedaris film "Strangers With Candy" (being released this year) and "The Show (Achilles Heels)" for Baryshnikov; first done by the White Oak Dance Project in 2002, it's being remounted next fall by the new Baryshnikov Dance Foundation.

For a run of "Martha@" in Italy last fall, Move, who's fluent in Italian, translated the entire script. "The speeches in Italian are stunning, like the one from 'Night Journey' — in English, it's 'torn by her passion, her terror, her fear, her unbridled lust, her wanton desire. ...'" He spits out the words in Italian, and you expect the sofa to catch on fire.

And he just got back from hosting (as Martha) the ceremony for the Nijinsky Award given by the Monaco Dance Foundation, sharing the stage with Prince Albert and Princess Stephanie. "None of this I could have ever predicted!"

"You know what I say now?" he says. "That I just stay out of Martha's way. Because there's just no telling where she's going to end up next."

Janice Steinberg is a San Diego dance writer.