

# The Guardian

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## Dance

### Martha's divine seed

Richard Move

Brick Lane Music Hall,  
London

★★★★

When Richard Move first started performing his Martha Graham impersonations in the New York night club Mother, he was issued with numerous cease and desist notices by the Graham estate.

Seeing his show at the Brick Lane Music Hall, it's easy to see why this 6ft 4in transver-



**Divas delight ...** Richard Moves quivers and quakes as Martha Graham Photograph: Tristram Kenton

tite should so unnerve the official guardians of Graham's work. In his finely trodden line between homage and parody, Move captures a mix of grandeur and absurdity that's very close to how the

late, great choreographer might have been.

Move is a foot taller than his subject and cannot recreate the unique shock of her dramatically ravaged face. But his makeup is perfect, and when

he speaks he gets Graham's voice down to its deepest diva vowels and brittle girlish overtones.

He also possesses her capacity to dominate the stage, and the serenity of Graham in-

spired choreography performed by him and his four dancers are expertly mastered. Jane Dudley, who danced with Graham for many years, was heard to acknowledge at Sunday's show, "Well, they sure can move."

The single male dancer in the show is an exact, comic quintessence of the stiff-legged hunks who played second fiddle to Graham's histrionic heroines while the women (Move included) arch and quiver in intense Graham mode.

However, they also wickedly exaggerate the style's most hectic mannerisms, so that as you delight in their accuracy you're also laughing like a drain. Graham, after all, trod her own line between genius and nonsense, and nowhere more than in her writings, which Move quotes and parodies.

I doubt Graham actually said that her male dancers should walk as if they carried the world's only seed, but she could easily have done.

The show's cabaret format makes it easy for Move to switch between reverence and comedy. What's less successful is his inclusion of other artists in the programme, whose contributions do not quite add up.

The exception is a bizzarely wonderful solo performed by Mark Morris, set to a tape recording of a sleepwalker, compulsively narrating a dream about a balloon flight to the moon. Morris looking deranged in a night shirt, dances a **tragi-comic evocation** of a man lost in cloudy visions, which is also a perfect complement to Graham — whose own greatness was rooted in her lonely, overwhelming commit-

ment to her art.

Comic or serious, it is the tilting towering drama of Graham's life and work that Move so expertly communicates. Through him we recognise the scale of an artist who made almost everyone else look safe and small.

**Judith Mackrell**

*At the Brick Lane Music Hall, London EC2 (0171-387 0031), tonight, City Varieties, Leeds (0113-243 0808), November 1, and Sandfield Theatre, Nottingham (0115-952 6611), November 3.*