

Body Snatchers

Richard Move's glorious, goofy homage to Martha Graham; Boris Eifman's distinctly un-Balanchine Balanchine. BY LAURA SHAPIRO

BY TRADITION, a stage is never left completely dark when the show is over: A bare bulb known as the ghostlight burns all night. Martha Graham called it "a symbol of all the lives and legends that are still in this theater." Too bad the great pioneer of modern dance couldn't know that after her death she would be awarded her own personal ghostlight, in human form. There's no other category in which to put Richard Move's relation to Graham, no performance mode that adequately describes what he does in her name. Such terms as *drag* and *parody* seem irrelevant. He is Graham's ghostlight: When he shines, the glitter we see is hers.

Since 1996, Move has been staging Graham evenings in New York and around the country, declaiming her fulsome truths about life and art and offering loopy versions of her most famous works, accompanied by dancers he plucks right from the Graham school and company. Now this funny, loving, dazzling homage has been captured in

Ghostlight, a film by Christopher Herrmann that is currently playing at the Pioneer Theater.

Herrmann, who worked with Graham from 1987 until her death in 1991, loosely structures the film as a fictional documentary. Downtown performer Ann Magnuson plays Barbara Rosen, a filmmaker long besotted with Graham

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who's following her idol with a camera crew as she choreographs a new work. There's a story line of sorts involving a financial crisis: there are cameo appearances by Mark Morris, Deborah Harry, and Isaac Mizrahi; but the main

event is Move. Rosen watches starry-eyed as Graham—six-four, draped in robes and adorned with jewels, her eyes made up so richly they could be a couple of peacocks—grandly descends a winding stair in a sumptuous duplex. She doesn't greet her guests so much as acknowledge a fresh audience. "The necklace is a gift from the Emperor Akihito," she announces in a breathy, operatic alto, gazing up toward the balcony of a theater only she can see. It's her version of "Nice to meet you."

Move's Graham is a fully realized entity: there isn't a hint of hairy-legged humor in this characterization. Plunging across the rehearsal studio as a crazed and ravaged Phaedra, berating her assistants, flinging wisdom at her company ("You must dance from your vagina!"), or contemplating the city from her rooftop with a bottle of whiskey, Graham towers like one of those giant Buddhas that dwarfs all worshippers. Herrmann includes wonderful sequences of fake historical footage showing the youthful Graham working ardently with her disciples, or racing through a dreamscape in a toga, hair flying in the wind—imagery that seems to be emanating from Graham's own psyche. Move's version of Graham operates as if he'd been able to locate the exact person Graham dreamed of being, the one she carefully placed in the mirror to play the part of her reflection. Is it possible that the impersonation of a genius might have a longer shelf life than the genius did? Much of Graham's work looks sadly dated now, but Move's performance is one for the ages.

Move (as Martha) arrives with company in *Ghostlight*.

