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Move to keep icon alive

DANCE REVIEW

MARTHA@ . . . THE 1963 INTERVIEW - Richard Move and MoveOpolis!

Dance Theater Workshop, 219 W. 19th St.; 212-924-0077. Through tomorrow.

By Leigh Witchel

Richard Move doesn't imitate Martha Graham: He channels her. And while Mikhail Baryshnikov (nearly incognito in a hat and scarf) and the rest of Wednesday's opening-night audience might have anticipated a parody in drag, what they got was more subtle: Graham illuminated.

"Martha@ . . . The 1963 Interview" evolved from a recently unearthed 1963 recording of an hourlong talk between the modern-dance pioneer and critic Walter Terry. Here, Lisa Kron portrays Terry in another gender-bending performance, also played straight. She and Move go through the interview nearly verbatim.



Richard Move as Martha
Photo by Josef Auer

Playing diminutive dance great Martha Graham is a tall order for 6-foot-4 Richard Move in this gender-bending role. The set is simple: chairs and old-fashioned microphones. Graham discusses the movement and motivations of some of the characters she portrayed: Greek heroines Medea, Phaedra and Jocasta, but also St. Joan and the anonymous frontier wife in her great "Appalachian Spring."

Meanwhile, two Graham dancers, Katherine Crockett and Catherine Cabeen, perform brief moments from the works discussed, bringing the evening from re-enactment to theater.

Amid the history, there's humor. During a particularly rambling response, Terry surreptitiously sniffs the cup from which Graham is drinking, and it's not water. But most of the jokes, like Graham's composed, stony look when mentioning a rival, are deadpan.

Move and the icon he plays are an unlikely match: the real Martha was tiny; Move is a lanky 6-foot-4, and his piled-high fake chignon makes him taller.

But it takes someone as big as Move to contain Graham's outsize personality -- her confident and studied glamour, neat phrasing and dangerous charm. Even more, Move shows her fierce commitment to the mystique of the heroines she portrayed -- and her own.

It helps to know something first about Graham's life and dances. But even if you don't, her tales here -- more incantations than answers to her interviewer's questions -- weave a spell all their own.