

# TODAY

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Saturday 23 August 2014

## **SIFA 2014: Q&A with Martha Graham**



**Richard Move gets under Martha Graham's skin in Martha@... The 1963 Interview at SIFA 2014. Photo: Amy Arbus**

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SINGAPORE — Welcome back, Move-in-Martha.

I was worried about getting Richard Move/Martha Graham fatigue after already watching one show and one mockumentary at The OPEN but nah, it's all good. Martha@... The 1963 Interview is still one fascinating portrait of the ultimate diva of western modern dance.

It's a lot more talking than dancing here as Move recreates Graham's interview with the late dance critic Walter Terry at the cultural centre 92 Street Y in New York, based on an audio recording. The playful switching and roleplaying extends to Terry, who's performed by actress Lisa Kron (who, by the way, sounds like Ellen DeGeneres).

As interviews go, this is one hell of an interview between two longtime friends, having known each other since the early '30s. It really is one illuminating dissection of Graham's artistic process: The rationale behind and the approach in interpreting her female characters, her thoughts on modern dance in relation to ballet, the basis of the trademark Graham movements and their links to visual art, her unusual thought processes (If you get bored of dancing the same things over and over, "think you're dancing to your own death", she says). (Terry has a bit of a moment, too, namedropping another dance giant, Ruth St Denis.)

She's brill, but I don't think I want to go on a holiday with her. I can't think of any pop figure right now who can actually get away behaving how Graham behaved in a public setting. Yes, she's definitely a venerated icon extending beyond dance but, setting her contributions and practice aside, let's just say she'd be an easy target for Joan Rivers. Here's someone who's on a completely different wavelength, the embodiment of the self-absorbed, insufferable genius artist who can say with an intense seriousness that everything matters, "from the way we walk to the pain in

one's neck". Graham is completely into dance—just as Move is completely into Martha.

Because, obviously, that's the other bit here: The layers of performances taking place. When Terry/Kron kicks things off by asking Graham/Move about how a character is developed, and Graham/Move answers... instant meta moment.

Throughout the interview-performance, as Graham/Move discusses her dance pieces, dancers step out to perform snippets to illustrate these. One of the things it does is it separates Graham the persona from Graham the dancer. Move still occasionally shows his, erm, moves, but now purely in the context of playing a role. In a sense, it frees him from the burden of truly stepping into the shoes of a dancer and us the burden of seeing him as one. Interestingly, while both Move and the dancers interpret Graham, the former feels staged as opposed to the more authentic and real feel of the latter (even though you just easily swap descriptors). Such, perhaps, is the primal influence and power that dance, more than acting, has over the body.

Martha@... The 1963 Interview runs until Aug 23, 8pm, SOTA Drama Theatre. Tickets from \$30 to \$50 at SISTIC. For more on SIFA 2014, visit <https://sifa.sg/>.