



UAPRESENTS STUDENT CRITIC PROGRAM

Martha Graham Dance Company

Review by Navrose Gill

The Martha Graham Dance Company dancers were extremely talented performers who seemed to jump and move across the floor effortlessly. The power and discipline these dancers maintain is extraordinary, and they display such talents wonderfully throughout the performance. Although I could see such wonderful glimpses of these talented dancers, I longed to see more “dancing” and less of the history behind it. The show in itself was very informative and inspirational, with narrated retrospection of Martha Graham’s career with personal excerpts and commentary from the idol herself.

I completely understand that Martha Graham was an extraordinarily talented dancer who single handedly created contemporary dance and a dance revolution that left a significant impact on American art and culture. The dancing that Martha Graham exhibited in this show through her performers was that of human form, where there was dramatic and lively inflections of the body that sent a message through the magnificent movements and contortions. The issue that I had with the show was the overdone and repetitive history lessons and dances that consisted mainly of the same motions over and over again. There was a lot of political and historical context surrounding many of the dances, and the dramatics and lighting of the show really set the monotonous and depressing tones of the show.

One such performance that I felt was lacking more of the dancing aspect that I was expecting from the show was that of the “Tenant of the Street” performance. The repetitive, slow movements got the message of homelessness and hunger across, but it was overdone and there wasn’t a variety of movements and talent displayed. The way the performer used her arms, held straight, suggested that her character might be crippled or of a lower caste. The dance was performed to what sounded like car noises and as the dancer moved her arms very slowly, haltingly, on a downward diagonal line, she appeared to be reaching for something. Her emotions transformed from angry to sad, and continuously back and forth. The piece felt more like a struggle of emotions with a distinct historical background, and I felt as if the actual dance of the piece was left to the wayside. I feel like the dancing portion of the piece did not need to be compromised for the historical portion of it.

For example, another piece that possessed a similar historical undertone, yet kept the dancing portion varied and engaging was that of “Appalachian Spring”. Originally titled “Ballet for Martha”, this dance piece was set in a springtime wilderness where characters like a bride, groom, revivalist, and elderly pioneer woman paraded onstage and retold their unique stories through the movements of dance. From wonderfully executed stag motions and dynamic, fluid movement utilizing the whole of the stage, the performers’ talents were beautifully exhibited and the historical context and individual stories of the characters’ happiness were skillfully depicted. The angular jumps and vibrant yet electrified approaches of the dancers portrayed the optimistic bliss clearly evident in the dance scene.

Modern dance can at times be very abstract and seemingly bizarre, but there is a subtle and appreciative message behind it all. Through the Martha Graham Dance Company, it was not difficult to welcome and understand the emotive force behind each dance and to deduce the deeper meanings behind each unique piece of art.