



## Review: Martha Graham Dance Company Continues Its Legacy and Ensures Its Future With Teens@Graham

By Bethany Hopta, Contributing Writer, April 17, 2018

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The Martha Graham Dance Company, the oldest dance company in America, continued its 92nd season with performances of their *Scared/Profane* program at New York City Center this past weekend. On Saturday evening Janet Eilber, the artistic director of the company, welcomed the audience and gave a brief description of each piece. Her comments established themes for the evening: honoring the tradition of Martha Graham with examples of her works throughout the course of her career, reimagining pieces, and presenting new choreography to showcase a company that continues to thrive.

The performance opened with a solo piece, *Ekstasis*, danced by Anne Souder in a white, form-fitting costume that easily changed shaped with the movements of the dancer; torso articulations were especially emphasized in the choreography. The piece was further dramatized by the lighting designed by Nick Hung, encircling the dancer, and leaving the rest of the stage dark. The quote "The body is a sacred garment" by Martha Graham accompanied the text of this piece in the program; it is especially applicable to this dance.



Teens@Graham students in Martha Graham's *Panorama*; photo: Melissa Sherwood.

The mood shifted from contemplative and graceful to commanding, energetic, and joyful with *Panorama*, a piece with three themes: dedication, imperial, and popular. The Teens@Graham All-City *Panorama* Project, ages 13-17, took the stage with an energy and enthusiasm that was welcomed by a warm reception from audience. The dancers wore red: short-sleeved shirts and straight leg pants for the men and wrap skirts for the women. The emphasis of the choreography seemed to be the grouping of the dancers and the preciseness of the movements of the groups. The feeling from the piece was joyous; the dancers captured a beautiful optimism.





Laurel Dalley Smith and Ari Mayzick in *Histoire*; photo: Melissa Sherwood.

*Histoire*, originally choreographed in 1999 and then augmented in 2018, features the choreography of Lucinda Childs in the style of the Martha Graham. Originally a duet, the new choreography adds six more dancers to the stage. All of the dancers are clad in dark colors: the duet couple in black and black gauze, and the six dancers in grey and grey gauze. The music by Krzysztof Knittel and Astor Piazzolla is an electric sounding harpsichord accompaniment to a graceful, beautiful piece.



Martha Graham Dance Company in *The Rite of Spring*; photo: Ani Collier.

The evening ended with *The Rite of Spring* telling the story of a young maiden's sacrifice for a bountiful harvest. Set to composer Igor Stravinsky's work bearing the same name, and performed by the Mannes Orchestra, (conducted by David Hayes), the choreography and distinctive music combine to illustrate the themes of death, life, and return to the earth. The costumes were minimal, emphasizing physique. The men wore black, fitted shorts and the women, white and black flowing skirts and skin-tone mesh tops. The Chosen One became more emphasized after an onstage transformation when her hair was released from its bun and her skirt was changed to a plain white one. The Shaman wore black pants and a tunic of white on one side and black on the other, constructed in a square shape, and visually, dramatic.



Ben Schultz (standing) and Peiju Chien-Pott in *The Rite of Spring*; photo: Xiao Jing Wang.

The recent run of performances illustrates the relevance this celebrated company maintains and upholds. With a commitment to new choreography and honoring its tradition, the Martha Graham Dance Company is worth experiencing.

Martha Graham Dance Company at the New York City Center, 131 West 55th Street, April 11-15, 2018. LaRue Allen, Executive Director; Janet Eilber, Artistic Director.

*Ekstasis*, choreography by Martha Graham reimagined by Virginie Mecene; original music by Lehman Engel; music for reimagined *Ekstasis* by Ramon Humet. Lighting by Nick Hung; costume by Martha Graham. Premiere: May 4, 1933, Guild Theatre, New York City. *Ekstasis* (reimagined): February 14, 2017, The Joyce Theater, New York City. Dancer: Anne Souder

*Panorama*, choreography and costumes by Martha Graham, restaged and directed by Oliver Tobin and Amelie Benard; assistant: Mia Seroc; music by Norman Lloyd. Lighting by David Finley. Premiere: August 14, 1935, Vermont State Armory, Bennington, VT. Dancers: Teens@Graham All-City *Panorama* Project: Melanie Acevedo, Samantha Bajor, Christal Barzey, Isabella Bower, Odyssey Bowser, Julianne Buenaventura, Tatianna Burchette, Caitlin Chavez, Anbriel Chery, Elizabeth Chin, Kate Chui, Deanna Day Cruz, Julia R. Diaz, Elizabeth Fields, Jordan Guerrero, Isabella Hernandez, Alina Krajewski, Pavee Kwunchaithanya, Rhiannon Larsen, Laurice Lawrence, Calla Lichtenwalter, Kai McCoy, Ashley Miesegaes, Frida Molina, Isabella Pagano, Babou Sanneh, Alyssa Scamardella, Luna Simone-Gonzalez, Sophia Tsang, Annie Villamarin, Shawnia Yon, Rebekah Young, Brianni Yunez

*Histoire*, choreography by Lucinda Childs; music by Krzysztof Knittel and Astor Piazzolla. Lighting by Yi-Chung Chen; costumes by Karen Young. Dancers: Laurel Dalley Smith, Ari Mayzick, Lloyd Knight, Lloyd Mayor, Marzia Memoli, Anne O'Donnell, Ben Schultz, Anne Souder

*The Rite of Spring*, choreography by Martha Graham; music by Igor Stravinsky. Costumes by Pilar Limosner after Martha Graham and Halston; new production concept by Janet Eilber; lighting by Solomon Weisbard; scenery by Edward T. Morris; projection design by Paul Lieber; projection design associates: Erik Pearson and Olivia Sebesky. Premiere: February 28,

1984, New York State Theater, New York City. Dancers: The Chosen One: Peiju Chien-Pott; The Shaman: Ben Schultz; So Young An, Laurel Dalley Smith, Natasha M. Diamond-Walker, Mariza Memoli, Anne O'Donnell, Anne Souder, Leslie Andrea Williams, Leon Cobb, Alessio Crognale, Abdiel Jacobsen.

*Cover: Teens@Graham students in Martha Graham's 'Panorama'; photo: Melissa Sherwood.*