

Martha Graham Dance Company returns for its 99th season with 'Dances of the Mind' at NYC's Joyce Theater

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World-renowned Martha Graham Dance Company, founded by the legendary dancer and choreographer in 1926, as both the oldest dance company in the US and the longest integrated, returns to The Joyce Theater for its 99th season, featuring eleven works across three rotating programs entitled [*Dances of the Mind*](#), showcasing a selection of her electrifying psychodramas from the 1940s and '50s, alongside powerful works from the most influential choreographers of today.





Erick Hawkins, Merce Cunningham, and Martha Graham in *Deaths and Entrances*. Photo by Barbara Morgan.

The evening performance on Sunday, April 6, beginning at 7:30 pm, offered a masterful presentation of Program C, with two iconic psychological classics by Graham (1894-1991) – *Deaths and Entrances* of 1943, inspired by the Brontë sisters, and the Greek-themed *Errand Into the Maze* of 1947, with a modernist set by Isamu Noguchi – and the popular *CAVE*, a recent work of 2022, by London-based Israeli choreographer, dancer, and composer Hofesh Shechter (a 2016 Tony nominee for Best Choreography for Barton Sher's revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*), with a score of electronic music by German duo Âme and Shechter.

Presented for the first time since 2012, *Deaths and Entrances*, with choreography by Graham, music by Hunter Johnson, a minimal set with significant props by Arch Lauterer, warm lighting by Judith M. Daitsman, and historicizing costumes by Oscar de la Renta (created for the 2005 revival, after Graham's originals), fashions a dance narrative through achronological stream-of-consciousness recollections of the struggles and heartbreak women encounter when following their impulses in the face of gender-based tradition and convention, societal and familial expectations, as embodied here by the 19th-century English writers Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë.

Emotional memories flow from the heart and mind of the eldest, triggered by household objects that have a deep resonance with her of her childhood, sisters, and lovers, longing, and broken relationships, eliciting feelings of anger, angst, and brooding. Performed by Anne Sounder with Laurel Dalley Smith and Leslie Andrea Williams as the adult women, Meagan King, Devin Loh, and Amanda Moreira as their younger selves, Lloyd Knight and Richard Villaverde respectively as The Dark and The Poetic Beloved, and Ethan Palma and Jai Perez as The Cavaliers, in period-style attire that suits their ages, the dance contrasts balletic grace and fluidity with stylized poses and staccato movements to express the shifting moods, from romantic allure to psychological turmoil. Beginning and ending with the women at a chessboard, we are left with the thought that life is like a chess game, determined by the moves one makes in competition with another player.





Amanda Moreira, Devin Loh, and Meagan King in *Deaths and Entrances*. Photo by Brian Pollock.

Following the opening segment was *Errand Into the Maze*, another emotive masterwork by Graham (choreography and costumes), derived from the ancient Greek myth of Theseus, but here delving into the mind of a female protagonist who enters the labyrinth and does battle three times with the half man/half beast creature the Minotaur – a metaphor for our inner demons and fears – before finally overpowering him. Choreographed as a duet and set to a score by Gian Carlo Menotti, the modern dance has the woman in a long white gown moving across Noguchi's suggestive abstract set of a curving white rope on the stage floor (a combination of the maze and the ball of thread given by Ariadne to aid Theseus in the ancient myth) until she reaches a v-shaped portal, evocative of a bare tree, the horns of the beast, and the bones of a pelvis (a design inspired by Jungian psychology and primordial archetypes, which, at one point, she wraps the rope around to prevent passage through it). There she encounters her opponent, clad only in tight black briefs.

Dancers Xin Ying and Ethan Palma move in antithetical ways, as she makes her way with her feet sliding and stepping horizontally around the maze, and he jumps up and down, behind and above her, with angular bends of his limbs, until their final confrontation: he drops to the floor, and she is free and triumphant. The piece is enhanced with original lighting by Jean Rosenthal, adapted by Beverly Emmons, and a projection of the moon, implying that it's all a dream in the darkness of the night.





Martha Graham Dance Company in *CAVE*. Photo by Chris Jones.

Closing the show was the high-energy *CAVE*, with Shechter's choreography taking the dance of the techno-club scene that emerged in the 1980s-90s and creating a rave-style experience. The visceral theme of the youthful piece was suggested by international ballet star and Creative Producer Daniil Simkin, with Schechter invited by the Graham Company to originate a version of it for the stage, as a prelude to Simkin's larger idea. With powerful kinetic force, the entire company of So Young An, Ane Arieta, Laurel Dalley Smith, Zachary Jeppsen-Toy, Meagan King, Lloyd Knight, Antonio Leone, Devin Loh, Amanda Moreira, Jai Perez, Anne Souder, Richard Villaverde, Leslie Andrea Williams, and Xin Ying, in club wear by Caleb Krieg, moved to the beat of the electronic music of Âme and Shechter, with arms raised, completely lost in their expressive physical ecstasy, under the transportive lighting of Yi-Chung Chen.

Often fast-paced and frenetic, at times slower, and seemingly drugged out, the collective movement, always in pace with the music that changed from percussive to hip-hop, broke for a sequence of solo dancers letting loose, surrounded and appreciated by the group, as well as by the vocal audience, who cheered them on at the performance I attended. The mood was exhilarating, closing the show on a high and bringing the modern Martha Graham Dance Company firmly into our post-modern era.

Running Time: Approximately one hour and 40 minutes, including an intermission.



[Dances of the Mind](#) plays through Sunday, April 13, 2025, at Martha Graham Dance Company, performing at The Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, NYC. For tickets (priced at \$55-75, plus fees), call (212) 242-0800, or go [online](#).