



PUBLISHED MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 2014 AT 1:30 AM / UPDATED AT 1:01 AM

REVIEW

Martha Graham Dance Company performance unites iconic, new

By Kim Carpenter / World-Herald Correspondent

To call Martha Graham iconic almost feels like an understatement.

The master of 20th century dance was so instrumental in changing ballet — indeed, to the point where we now think of her work in terms of modern dance rather than ballet — that superlatives don't seem to do her justice.

Sunday night at the Orpheum Theater provided an ideal opportunity to experience just how truly revolutionary she was.

The Martha Graham Dance Company, which is the oldest in the U.S., performed two of Graham's most seminal pieces and added two new works that demonstrated her indelible contributions to contemporary dance.

The evening opened with Appalachian Spring, perhaps Graham's best-known piece. Aaron Copland composed the now-famous score set to a sequence of a man and woman building a house. It's a story marked by the optimism pioneers had when starting their lives in the Promised Land, and the dancer's movements were filled with kinetic, at times almost frenetic, joy.

Blakeley White-McGuire as the bride danced with exuberant lightness, while Abdiel Jacobsen as her husband combined extreme athleticism with finely controlled strength. Maurizio Nardi, a last-minute replacement, was impressive with an almost violent intensity that marked his every moment.

Next was Lamentation Variations, which opened with a film of Graham performing this iconic choreography, and it aptly reminded the audience of her ability to elicit raw emotion through her art form. An eerie recording of her discussing this dance followed, which then segued into work created in 2007 to commemorate the anniversary of 9/11.

The variations featured pieces by three choreographers, and it was fascinating to see how the dancers nimbly united modern with contemporary dance to create a hybrid whole.

After intermission, *Errand*, choreographed by Graham, served as a metaphor for our own personal battles with darkness and the ultimate emergence into light.

Superbly danced by White-McGuire and Jacobsen, *Errand* demonstrated how remarkably fraught with tension Graham's staging was. The duo danced with nanosecond timing marked by a push-pull type of give and take as each struggled for supremacy.

The evening concluded with *Echo*, a work still in progress that won't make its official debut in New York until March. It was a preview that most likely won't be danced the same as it was Sunday, and it was a remarkable treat to experience it in its still-evolving state.

Choreographed by Andonis Foniadakis, the work was inspired by the Greek myth of Narcissus and Echo and was characterized by jaw-dropping choreography from start to finish. The dancers moved with chaotic yet controlled whiplash intensity, and the dancers portraying Narcissus and his reflection had remarkable sexual chemistry, adeptly demonstrating why the former's vanity proved his doom.

If *Echo's* debut is a fraction of what the preview was like Sunday, New York audiences are in store for phenomenal contemporary dance. It was a fitting way to end the performance, and it showcased how inspirational Graham's choreography remains and just how deeply she continues to influence the way today's choreographers conceive and articulate new work.