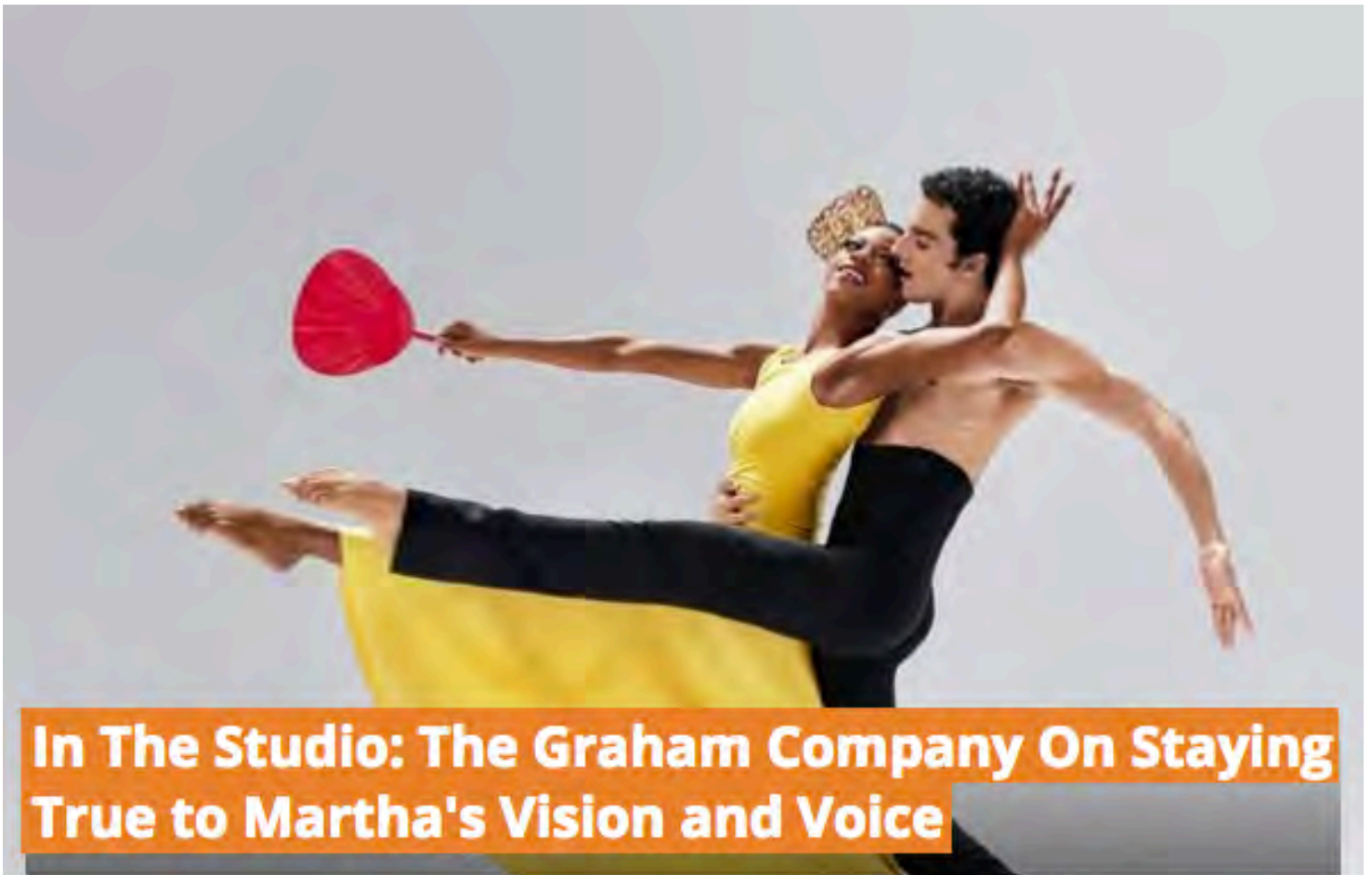


In The Studio: The Graham Company On Staying True to Martha's Vision and Voice

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Leslie Andrea Williams and Lorenzo Pagano in Martha Graham's "Embattled Garden"© Hibbard Nash Photography

The much-anticipated Martha Graham Dance Company season at [New York City Center](#) is upon us. From April 11–14, the company will present classics like *Chronicle*, the sly melodrama *Embattled Garden* and of course Graham's visceral masterwork *The Rite of Spring*. This season also includes works by internationally acclaimed choreographers Lucinda Childs, Lar Lubovitch and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.

We sat down with Graham artistic director Janet Eilber to talk about bringing back older Graham works, working with new choreographers and what Martha would have to say about today's wave of feminism.



MGDC in rehearsal with artistic director Janet Eilber.

How do you decide which choreographers would be a good fit for the company?

There are a number of things that go into it but one is the theme of our season. We launched *Sacred/Profane* last year at The Joyce Theater and it continues this year at New York City Center. We commissioned Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui because he's known to do spiritual works, which he did in creating *Mosaic*. Whereas Lucinda's work goes more under profane. Her signature is to take everyday movement and manipulate it into choreography which she does brilliantly. Lar's work is a mixture of both. He came to us and asked if we would be part of his 50th anniversary and we were honored.

When it comes to reworking pieces from so long ago, how do you stay true to Martha's voice?

With Martha's work it's easy because she was a leader in the modernist movement. Her work is really stripped down to the elemental—to what will evoke a reaction from the audience. Even though *Embattled Garden* was choreographed in 1958, the elements are so strikingly modern, I think they still have a powerful impact.

We also have to incorporate the facility of the new dancers which was also something Martha was always aware of. The mission is to do what she did; to maintain the very direct emotional impact and the message that she intended, rather than let it get diffused by things that get added. We keep it clean so that it speaks the way she intended.

***Embattled Garden* was originally created on the cusp of the sexual revolution. What do you think Martha would have to say about today's wave of feminism?**

I think she was always instrumental in empowering women. She claims she never felt any inhibitions placed on her nor felt contained by male power. She was always someone who said what she wanted to say and she was all about personal empowerment—which she expressed through her art.

