

MARTHA GRAHAM

DANCE COMPANY



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ABOUT THE COMPANY

The Martha Graham Dance Company has been a leader in the development of contemporary dance since its founding in 1926. Informed by the expansive vision of pioneering choreographer Martha Graham, the Company brings to life a timeless and uniquely American style of dance that has influenced generations of artists and continues to captivate audiences. Graham and her Company have expanded the contemporary dance vocabulary of movement and forever altered the scope of the art form by rooting works in contemporary social, political, psychological, and sexual contexts, deepening their impact and resonance.

Always a fertile ground for experimentation, the Martha Graham Dance Company has been an unparalleled resource in nurturing many of the leading choreographers and dancers of the 20th and 21st centuries, including Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, Pearl Lang, Pascal Rioult, and Paul Taylor. Graham's repertory of 181 works has also engaged noted performers such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Claire Bloom, Margot Fonteyn, Liza Minnelli, Rudolf Nureyev, Maya Plisetskaya, and Kathleen Turner. Her groundbreaking techniques and unmistakable style have earned the Company acclaim from audiences in more than 50 countries throughout North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Today, the Company continues to foster Graham's spirit of ingenuity. It is embracing a new programming vision that showcases masterpieces by Graham, her contemporaries, and their successors, alongside newly commissioned works by contemporary artists inspired by Graham's legacy. With programs that unite the work of choreographers across time within a rich historical and thematic narrative, the Company is actively working to create new platforms for contemporary dance and multiple points of access for audiences.

The Martha Graham Dance Company's repertory includes Graham masterpieces *Appalachian Spring*, *Lamentation*, *Cave of the Heart*, *Night Journey*, and *Chronicle*, among other works. The Company continues to expand its mission to present the work of its founder and her contemporaries, and remains a leader by catalyzing new works with commissions that bring fresh perspectives to dance classics, including *Lamentation Variations* (2007), which provides presenters with the opportunity to commission a new variation with a guest choreographer of their choice. Multimedia programs such as *Prelude and Revolt* (2007), use a montage of several works connected through text and media.



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ABOUT MARTHA GRAHAM

Martha Graham's revolutionary vision and artistic mastery has had a deep and lasting impact on American art and culture. Her bold use of socially infused subjects and emotionally charged performances single-handedly defined contemporary dance as a uniquely American art form, which the nation has in turn shared with the world.

Graham's creativity crossed artistic boundaries and embraced every artistic genre. She collaborated with and commissioned work from the leading visual artists, musicians, and designers of her day, including sculptor Isamu Noguchi and fashion designers Halston, Donna Karan, and Calvin Klein, as well as composers Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, William Schuman, Norman Dello Joio, and Gian Carlo Menotti.

Influencing generations of choreographers and dancers including Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp, Graham forever altered the scope of dance. Classical ballet dancers Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Baryshnikov sought her out to broaden their artistry, and artists of all genres were eager to study and work with Graham — she taught actors including Bette Davis, Kirk Douglas, Madonna, Liza Minelli, Gregory Peck, Tony Randall, Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, and Joanne Woodward to utilize their bodies as expressive instruments. Today, renowned artists remain attracted to her work; Diana Visnehva and Blythe Danner have appeared in recent performances.

Graham's groundbreaking style grew from her experimentation with the elemental movements of contraction and release. By focusing on the basic activities of the human form, she enlivened the body with raw, electric emotion. The sharp, angular, and direct movements of her technique were a dramatic departure from the predominant style of the time.

With an artistic practice deeply ingrained in the rhythm of American life and the struggles of the individual, Graham brought a distinctly American sensibility to every theme she explored. "A dance reveals the spirit of the country in which it takes root. No sooner does it fail to do this than it loses its integrity and significance," she wrote in the 1937 essay "A Platform for the American Dance".

Consistently infused with social, political, psychological, and sexual themes, Graham's choreography is timeless, connecting with audiences past and present. Works such as *Revolt* (1927), *Immigrant: Steerage, Strike* (1928), and *Chronicle* (1936) — created the same year she turned down Hitler's invitation to perform at the International Arts Festival organized in conjunction with the Olympic Games in Berlin — personify Graham's commitment to addressing challenging contemporary issues and distinguish her as a conscientious and politically powerful artist.



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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Janet Eilber has been the Martha Graham Center's Artistic Director since 2005. Her direction has focused on creating new forms of audience access to the Martha Graham masterworks. These initiatives include designing contextual programming, educational and community partnerships, use of new media, and commissions and creative events such as the *Lamentation Variations* and *Prelude and Revolt*. In recent projects, she has created new arrangements of classic Graham choreography for such wide-ranging projects as the Martha Graham Google Doodle and the Italian theater production of *Cercando Picasso* starring Giorgio Albertazzi.

Earlier in her career, as a principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company, Ms. Eilber worked closely with Martha Graham. She danced many of Graham's greatest roles, had roles created for her by Graham, and was directed by Graham in most of the major roles of the repertory. She soloed at the White House, was partnered by Rudolf Nureyev, starred in three segments of *Dance in America*, and has since taught, lectured, and directed Graham ballets internationally.

Apart from her work with Graham, Ms. Eilber has performed in films, on television, and on Broadway, directed by such greats as Agnes de Mille and Bob Fosse, and has received four Lester Horton Awards for her reconstruction and performance of seminal American modern dance. She has served as Director of Arts Education for the Dana Foundation, guiding the Foundation's support for Teaching Artist training and contributing regularly to its arts education publications. Ms. Eilber is a Trustee Emerita of the Interlochen Center for the Arts. She is married to screenwriter/director John Warren, with whom she has two daughters, Madeline and Eva.



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TOURING REPERTORY

The Martha Graham Dance Company offers moving and authentic Graham experiences centered on engaging themes for a range of audiences and venues, which combine Graham classics with contemporary works created for the Company by artists such as Nacho Duato, Pam Tanowitz, and Doug Varone. New in 2019, "The EVE Project" explores women's experience through the lens of Graham's classic heroines and contemporary woman choreographers. The popular "Shape and Design" celebrates the distinctly American form of Modernism rooted in dynamism, athleticism, and simplicity, highlighting the work of Graham and her theatrical contemporaries, while "Inner Landscape" focuses on psychological works. Multimedia or spoken introductions open each program, offering new points of access for dance audiences. A "Noguchi/Graham" program includes three of Graham's greatest masterworks with sets by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi, and "Graham and Music" celebrates her collaborations with some of the 20th Century's leading composers. Recent additions to the repertory include a new production of The Rite of Spring.



The Company regularly customizes programs and ancillary events for a specific venue, an anniversary, or campus-wide theme drawing from the classic repertory. Local celebrities often provide narration for these venue-specific performances. The available classic repertory spans nine decades, showing the staggering scope and beauty of Martha Graham's work, from the power and simplicity of the all-woman group works and early solos to the acclaimed classics. Her ballets were inspired by a wide variety of sources including modern painting, heroic women, the American frontier, and Greek mythology. These provide fertile connections for many interdisciplinary activities. Performances may also feature Isamu Noguchi's most beautiful sets and original costumes by Martha Graham, and scores she commissioned from American composers such as Aaron Copland, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Norman Dello Joio, and Samuel Barber. Collaborations with local orchestras on programs featuring these important scores are extremely well received.

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THEMATIC PROGRAMS

The Graham Company specializes in thematically curated presentations that provide new portals to modern dance and encourage fresh thinking about the art form. Through programs that include classic Graham choreography and contemporary works, the Company encourages new dialog inspired by the experience in the theater.

In celebration of the Centenary of American Women's Right to Vote in 2020, the Graham Company has announced The EVE Project – the guiding force behind the Company's 2018/19 and the 2019/20 seasons. The EVE Project is designed to explore the many different facets of womanhood. The theme not only honors the progression of women in the last 100 years, but also provides entree into today's most pressing conversations. The Company is interested in collaborating with presenters and their local partners to augment main-stage performances with a range of auxiliary events. New works from several female choreographers have been commissioned, and the classic rep will feature both Graham's heroines and anti-heroines – all with an underlying statement about female power. In the spring of '19, a new work by Pam Tanowitz and a co-creation by Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jene Smith will be premiered. The work created for the Company by Annie-B Parson in 2017, *I used to love you*, will also be available.

Other thematic programs have included "Shape and Design," exploring modernism, "Myth and Transformation," featuring works by artists who investigate primal stories, and "Inner Landscape," highlighting Graham's psychological dramas. Programs that explore the Graham legacy include "Graham/Noguchi," and "Graham and Music," often presented in partnership with local orchestras.

These programs contain new choreography and a selection of dances from the great Graham masterworks. Over 15 masterworks are available: from *Appalachian Spring* to *Maple Leaf Rag* and *Night Journey*.



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CLASSICS BY MARTHA GRAHAM

Graham created some of the most enduring works in modern dance repertory and the Company offers many of these in rotation, changing from year to year. Artistic Director Janet Eilber works closely with presenters to build programs appropriate to their audiences, choosing from the following.

- The Early Solos (*Serenata Morisca, Lamentation, Satyric Festival Song, Deep Song, Imperial Gesture*)
- *Acts of Light*
- *Appalachian Spring*
- *Appalachian Spring Suite*
- *At Summer's Full* (selections from *Letter to the World* - 1940)
- *Cave of the Heart*
- *Chronicle*
- *Dark Meadow Suite*
- *Diversion of Angels*
- *El Penitente*
- *Errand into the Maze* (may be performed with or without sets)
- *Maple Leaf Rag*
- *Moon* (from *Canticle for Innocent Comedians*)
- *Night Journey*
- *Prelude and Revolt*
- *Panorama Project* (presented in partnership with local dance institutions)
- *The Rite of Spring*

WORKS BY OTHER ARTISTS

The Company usually works with two contemporary choreographers annually to bring new works into the repertory. Some recent commissions include:

- *Untitled (Souvenir)* by Pam Tanowitz
- *Deo* by Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jene Smith
- *Lamentation Variations* (featuring a selection of short works inspired by Graham's solo *Lamentation*)
- *Rust* by Nacho Duato
- *Echo* by Andonis Foniadakis
- *Woodland* by Pontus Lidberg
- *Mosaic* by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui
- *I used to love you* by Annie-B Parson
- *The Legend of Ten* by Lar Lubovitch

Programs can be customized for every venue.

Odysseys Into Martha Graham World, One Dramatic, the Other Abstract

By Gia Kourlas

April 2, 2019

Female power is something that Martha Graham radiated. This revolutionary modern dance choreographer, who once said that the only sin a person could have was mediocrity, created a repertory that celebrates women in all their grief and triumph.

This season, the Martha Graham Dance Company explores female empowerment with the start of its two-year EVE Project, commemorating the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment that gave women the power to vote. Included are two new works: Pam Tanowitz's "Untitled (Souvenir)," in which she merges Graham's steps with her own; and "Deo," a collaboration by Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jene Smith. Inspired by the myth of Demeter and Persephone, "Deo" explores issues surrounding women and mortality with, aptly, an all-female cast.

Janet Eilber, the company's artistic director, said it was important for the works to be different in approach. She chose her choreographers accordingly: drama on one side (Ms. Doyle and Ms. Smith) and pure movement on the other (Ms. Tanowitz).

"I was looking at Maxine Doyle because of her theatricality and her emotional content," she said. "Martha was really trying to create theater pieces with 'Death and Entrances' and even 'Appalachian Spring.' She called them dance-dramas."



The choreographer Pam Tanowitz rehearsing her new work, "Untitled (Souvenir)," with Graham dancers. Yana Paskova for The New York Times

Ms. Doyle, the associate director and choreographer of the British theater company Punchdrunk brought in Ms. Smith; they met when Ms. Smith performed in the immersive "Sleep No More," one of Punchdrunk's best-known productions. Before that, Ms. Smith was a member of Batsheva Dance Company where she trained in Gaga, the sensation-based dance language created by the choreographer Ohad Naharin.

While Ms. Smith veers toward luscious, deeply felt movement, Ms. Tanowitz loves to invent steps and to mine dance history for inspiration. She's done both for her premiere, in which she regards Graham's steps and set pieces — a few will decorate the stage, but subtly so — as souvenirs, or mementos, from her body of work. Specifically, she's used movement from "The Legend of Judith" (1967), which she said she related to on a visceral level; and "Dark Meadow" (1946), one of her favorite Graham works.

"I wanted the balance of Martha's abstraction and her modernism," Ms. Eilber said. "Pam's into puzzle solving, lines. It was also the fact that she was really interested in the idea of borrowing Graham material and transforming it."

Ms. Doyle and Ms. Smith were all about delving into the dancers' inherent theatricality. Ms. Tanowitz had a different mission: "How do we keep the physicality," she said, "but take away the overlay of the drama?"



Only emote: The choreographer Bobbi Jene Smith. Yana Paskova for The New York Times

In the end, what the works have in common is how they expose something singular: The dancers as individuals. What follows are edited excerpts from recent interviews with the choreographers about their odysseys into the world of Graham.

Pam Tanowitz

GRAHAM, PAM, GRAHAM, PAM I spliced together movement. I would take one step from Graham's "The Legend of Judith" and one step from Pam, and sew them together. That became a whole new phrase. In rehearsals, the dancers would be like, "Graham, Pam, Graham, Pam." I also took the male solo from "Dark Meadow" and made it a male trio. Lorenzo Pagano's doing the legs and the torso, Lloyd Mayor is doing the arms and then I have Lloyd Knight reversing it all.

A DANCE NERD'S DREAM COME TRUE I watched archival videos and that's where "The Legend of Judith" came in. I'm a dance nerd so it's all really exciting to me.

The dancers learned all the movement before I walked in for the first rehearsal. It was like Christmas morning: I had all of these steps to choose from. But it's scary. I have to say that. I try to forget about it and honor it, but I feel the weight of history on me.



“The drama isn’t there, but in a weird way it brings up feelings,” says Lloyd Knight, center, of Ms. Tanowitz’s dance. “You’re just coming out as yourself.”
Yana Paskova for The New York Times

SHE COULDN’T HELP HERSELF I planned on using existing Graham material that wasn’t necessarily well known, but I watched a rehearsal of “Dark Meadow,” which is a very famous piece I’m obsessed with. It starts out in silence — it’s basically step-touch, step-touch and to me it’s about group will and strong women. I couldn’t stop thinking about it so I used it. I broke my own rule.

NO DRAMA QUEENS What I’m asking them to do — to take away the drama — is very challenging. They don’t need to look out and to be presentational. I tell them to take their focus in. It’s strong and what we realized is that it’s created a different kind of drama: It’s about being present in the physicality and dancing with people onstage.

THE OUTCOME This showed me that my movement isn’t so different from Graham’s. [Laughs] It has told me that dance is dance and steps are steps. Aside from the obvious of the Graham architecture of the hands or the highly stylized head, the actual steps are steps that we all use.

A DANCER’S PERSPECTIVE:

Lloyd Knight: “You come in as you, and that’s a great feeling. You are performing, but it’s in a very stripped-down way. I loved every minute of it. The drama isn’t there, but in a weird way it brings up feelings: You’re just coming out as yourself!”



The Graham dancers rehearse “Deo.” Yana Paskova for The New York Times

Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jean Smith

THE FIRST STEPS

Maxine Doyle I did workshops with the company a couple of years ago and I really felt a connection with the women. I felt that there was a really interesting synergy between the movement language that Bobbi created on her own body as a dancer and how I could imagine that sitting or evolving or developing on the Graham women.

GOING GAGA

Bobbi Jene Smith Gaga and the Graham movement are very different, but there's something impulsively animal about the connection to pleasure and strength and power and imagination, and that magical combination of content and action and physicality. They both create that.

AND GOING GREEK

Doyle The myth of Demeter and Persephone really spoke to me as a woman, it spoke to me as a mother and it spoke to me as a daughter. I was thinking about how the work would sit within the rep, and how it could honor, in some way, the themes and concerns and ideas of Graham as a creator. Rather than telling the story or the narrative of Demeter, we decided to look more at the themes of the story, which are separation, rage and grief.

PASSION ON THE SURFACE

Doyle I worked with a process that is about using dramatic tone and physical tensions in the body to tell stories and express emotion. There's an inherent sensuality and connection to their vulnerability and their madness, and the distance between those two things, that I'm really drawn to.

YES, TO THE DRAMA

Smith I don't think you could ever ask them, "What are you thinking about in this moment?" and they'd say, "Oh nothing, I don't know yet. I'm working on it." They're coming with a whole vessel of memories and stories in their bodies.

A DANCER'S PERSPECTIVE:

Xin Yang "Bobbi talks about how as a woman you're almost like a mountain: You have your leg muscles, and you want to feel the power of them. You don't think, oh my legs are too big. [*Laughs*] Suddenly I feel, Oh, I'm beautiful just the way I am."

Martha Graham Dance Company
April 2-April 14 at Joyce Theater, Manhattan; joyce.org



The New York Times

Dance

The Ambiguous Layers of Martha Graham's 'El Penitente.'



A 1940 photograph of Martha Graham, Erick Hawkins and Merce Cunningham, dressed for "El Penitente." Credit: Via Martha Graham Dance Company

By Alastair Macaulay
March 26, 2019

When the choreographer Martha Graham added men to her company, it struck many as a contradiction in terms. Her all-female troupe, founded in 1926, had powerfully demonstrated women's independence. The only men with whom Graham regularly

collaborated were designers and composers: above all, the composer Louis Horst and the sculptor-designer Isamu Noguchi.

She introduced a male dancer, Erick Hawkins, to this troupe in 1937, causing dismay among several of her dancers, colleagues and devotees. But Graham was not to be stopped. Further complications soon arose: Hawkins, 15 years her junior, became her partner, her lover and, eventually, her husband. How is it for a woman with a younger man? What challenges are involved in marriage? How is it for an original female artist in a male-dominated society? These were now among her themes.

She added a second man to the company in 1939, Merce Cunningham. A series of her most remarkable works followed — notably “Deaths and Entrances” (1943), “Appalachian Spring” (1944) and “Cave of the Heart” (1946) — several with the Graham-Hawkins relationship at their center.



Graham, here in a 1940 photo for “El Penitente”; her role as Mary combined the Virgin Mother, the Magdalene and the Mater Dolorosa who laments her dead son. Credit: Barbara Morgan

In just one exceptional work, “El Penitente” (1940), she worked with all four: Horst, Noguchi, Hawkins, Cunningham. “Penitente,” a 20-minute masterpiece of neo-primitivist dance drama at its most ambiguously layered, returns to the Martha Graham Dance Company’s repertory this year. Newly coached by Marni Thomas Wood (who joined the

Graham troupe in 1958), it will be part of the company's season at the Joyce Theater (April 2-April 14). Horst composed its sparse, often percussive, score, his last for Graham. Noguchi, without any of the sculptural décor that he often used to define stage space, designed the props.

The three dancers are touring players, arriving with a cart to enact scenes from the Bible; those scenes are filtered through Spanish colonial traditions of the American Southwest, in which believers expiate sins by mortifying the flesh. You think you know how the Bible's central stories go? Think again.

Hawkins danced the challenging title role, the penitent who flagellates himself to attain fuller belief and enlightenment. (Mikhail Baryshnikov sometimes performed this part in the late 1980s and early '90s.) Graham's role as Mary combined the Virgin Mother, the Magdalene and the Mater Dolorosa who laments her dead son. In a dance with an apple, she also becomes Eve, tempting Adam with the fruit of the tree. Cunningham, his face mainly covered, played Christ, an often stiff figure whose gestures indicate blessing or rebuke; He was, Ms. Wood said in an email, "The avenging Angel, the forgiving Angel, the supporting Angel. (But we never called him God.)" There's much to unpack here; but "Penitente" moves fast.

"It embodies a kind of innocence not often explored in the Graham rep," Ms. Wood said of "El Penitente." That innocence lies in its seemingly naïve, antiheroic simplicity of style. Ms. Wood learned it in 1964 from Hawkins and from the Graham veteran Pearl Lang, and then received further direction from Graham herself. In January she taught it to the current company. "It requires investing a degree of naturalness that alternates with the dramatic (which can get 'over done' if you don't watch out)," she said.



From left, Ben Schultz, Anne O'Donnell and Lloyd Knight in "El Penitente," which the Martha Graham Dance Company will perform at the Joyce. Credit: Melissa Sherwood

How do other Graham-Hawkins roles compare to those in “Penitente”? “In most other dances, their relationship represents a clearly dramatic build that brings a message explored and developed throughout the entire work,” Ms. Wood said. “But ‘Penitente’ creates the spark of quickly dared transitions in and out of a different situation every few minutes. Martha did talk about telling the various stories as if you were peeling them off a chapel wall and your audience needed to know the difference between sinners and saints. She and Erick clearly enjoyed going back and forth between both those extremes.”

It’s a tough piece, expressively knotty, marked by the intense and rapid repetition of certain steps (explosive small, rapid jumps in particular, taking off from both feet and landing on one). And its Horst score heightens the tough atmosphere.

Janet Eilber, artistic director of the Graham company since 2005, told me in January that Horst was opposed to strings in modern-dance music. In a recent email, she elaborated: Horst “told Martha that she should develop her ideas for the dance first, and the music should be added later,” as opposed to what choreographers like Isadora Duncan and St. Denis were doing by choosing the score first and drawing inspiration from it. “As part of this idea,” Ms. Eilber wrote, “he felt that strings were too emotionally instructive — telling the audience what to feel.”

Yet within a few years Graham would be commissioning scores with plentiful strings: “Appalachian Spring” (1944) is the most celebrated. The advent of Hawkins changed many aspects of Martha Graham dance theater: even its very sound.



TDF Stages



The Martha Graham Dance Company rehearsing Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jene Smith's *Deo*. Photo by Melissa Sherwood.

All About the EVE Project

By **SUSAN REITER**

MAR 28, 2019 • DANCE

"Martha revolutionized the way women were presented on stage, creating complex, nuanced female characters." – Janet Eilber

Why the Martha Graham Dance Company is debuting new works by women during its two-week Joyce run

Since so many Martha Graham works feature heroines confronting crises or indulging their passions, the dance-maker's namesake company has long been known for showcasing strong

women. But this season the troupe's focus feels even more feminist because of **The EVE Project**, a two-year initiative to commission new pieces by female choreographers featuring powerful female roles in honor of the upcoming centennial of women winning the right to vote.

"I chose this theme in order to bring to the fore the fact that Martha revolutionized the way women were presented on stage, creating complex, nuanced female characters," says Janet Eilber, the company's artistic director and a former lead dancer who worked closely with Graham during the 1970s.

All of the pieces being presented in the Martha Graham Dance Company's **season at the Joyce Theater** (April 2-14) were created by women. As part of the troupe's ongoing effort to incorporate contemporary works that create a dialogue with the core Graham repertory, Eilber commissioned two premieres. Pam Tanowitz choreographed *Untitled (Souvenir)* set to two string quartets by Caroline Shaw; and Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jene Smith collaborated on the all-female *Deo*, performed to an original score by experimental electronic musician Lesley Flanigan. "What we really want are works that frame and contrast, that, in effect, make people look at the Graham works in relief," Eilber says.

Tanowitz tends to create coolly intellectual, highly contemporary works reminiscent of **Merce Cunningham's** style and technique, so the idea of her collaborating with Graham dancers is intriguing. "She has incorporated some movements from Graham, but they're mixed with pure Pam movement," explains Eilber. "The Graham moves actually get stripped of their emotional motivation and are really used as shapes. Our dancers are different in this piece than I've ever seen them."



Lloyd Mayor and Lorenzo Pagano in Pam Tanowitz's 'Untitled (Souvenir);'
photo by Luis Luque

For Anne O'Donnell, who's been with the company since 2014, tackling Tanowitz's transformation of classic Graham moves has proved a welcome challenge. "These are steps that I know so well in my body, and to have her manipulate parts of that was a fun process," O'Donnell says. "Pam's language is quite beautiful and very specific and detailed. She doesn't deal with the drama in those Graham pieces. So what does the same move look like if you take away the emotive physicality behind it?"

Eilber tapped Maxine Doyle, the associate director and choreographer for Punchdrunk's long-running immersive hit **Sleep No More**, because she "wanted something with emotional content, which she's very adept at." Doyle is the one who brought in Bobbi Jene Smith, a former Batsheva Dance Company member and current teacher of the distinctive **Israeli Gaga technique**. Their premiere, *Deo*, explores ideas and issues drawn from the Ancient Greek myth of **Demeter and Persephone**, though it's not a reenactment. "They just borrowed the myth for inspiration about mothers and daughters, basically the role of women in the cycle of mortality." Eilber says.

O'Donnell also performs in *Deo*, and she found that the two choreographers complemented each other. "Each one brought different expertise," she says. "Maxine brought a lot of history to it, with writings about the myth, and resources like images and texts. Meanwhile, Bobbi Jene is such a physical artist. She was in there sweating with us. She brought an element that was very raw."

The rest of Joyce season includes many staples by Graham from the 1930s and 1940s, as well as a revival of her lesser-known *Secular Games* from 1962. It was last performed while Eilber was still dancing in the company, and she recalls it featuring "a lot of energy, a lot of jumping and lifting. It's much more released than the heavy, dramatic works that Martha is famous for. It's about the antics of young people falling in and out of love, playing the games that young people play. Martha makes fun of both men and women equally. The question was: Would it speak to today's audience? I wanted to take the chance that it would, because she was touching on universal truths." It's also one of the rare moments when men will command the spotlight: On a few nights, its men's section is actually being performed by itself on a separate program.

artsmeme

The games people play, according to Martha Graham's 'Secular Games'

Debra Levine – March 4, 2019

<https://artsmeme.com/2019/03/04/the-games-people-play-according-to-martha-graham-in-secular-games-1962/>



Secular Games (1962) choreography by Martha Graham

Saturday night's across-the-board brilliance encompassing both classic and contemporary modern dance at the Younes & Soraya Center for the Performing Arts, aka The Soraya — an evening of nearly ecstatic, unwavering quality by the Martha Graham Dance Company — had *Secular Games*, dating from 1962, as a standout.

I loved the dance's spare Jean Rosenthal set, three little sculptural platforms punctuated by gymnasium ropes descending from the ceiling. And I loved the costumes — good old-fashioned leotards and tights, based on an original design by "*Secular*"'s choreographer, Martha Graham. That muscle-hugging gear looked very handsome on the current crop of Graham dancers.



secular games (1962) martha graham dance company, photo: luis luque

Indeed as the curtain rose on a tableau of wow-inducing, bare-chested male hunks that screamed, “We aren’t in 1962 anymore, Martha!” several in the audience audibly gasped. Graham always liked bulky men ... Robert Cohan comes to mind, of course Paul Taylor, but good god! You could almost feel the house mentally adjust to the prospect that with these gorgeous specimens we would pass the evening. That was perfectly fine by me. I don’t believe I’ve witnessed a group brandishing the Graham name so chock-filled with lithe, facile, gifted, grounded, versatile, capable, confident dancers.

In a [pre-performance panel discussion](#) (disclosure: I moderated the event), artistic director **Janet Eilber** admitted that the bar is much raised in terms of the physical capabilities of the dancers the company now attracts. It’s one of the signs and signals that the Graham company — along with its intense, personal, and even political repertory — is enjoying a robust renaissance.



sexual politics courtesy of martha graham photo: luis luques

Another sign is that a hot choreographer like **Pam Tanowitz**, whose aesthetic (if not her philosophy, she was quick to clarify at the panel) has been strongly influenced by Merce Cunningham, but who now — presumably attracted by working with these top-rung dancers and what choreographer wouldn't be — enjoyed the world premiere of her latest work, *Untitled (Souvenir)*, Saturday night, a commission by MGDC.



ta ta! right out of the Olympics photo by luis luque

What better way for the savvy Ms. Eilber (she is elegant but also mischievous) to showcase her company's newfound, ahem, *beefcake*, than in a work that at its inception was intended as a showpiece for bravura male dancing? The delightfully tongue-in-cheek *Secular Games*, with its oh so carefully planted physical jokes and readable choreography (it spools in 1962 time, which means you can imbibe it thoughtfully) gave deep pleasure. (Tanowitz used a retro tempo in her highly minimalist, very downtown work as well.) The entwined shapes, the show-offy tricks, the barely disguised competitive jousting, all impeccably delivered.

"Secular" opens, as mentioned above, with a staid tableau. Slowly slowly movement is introduced. But it arrives in a funny way, in an athletic ball passed between the men. It's a gentle 'ice breaker.' It's a funny pun. The men have balls. It also introduces risk. Will they catch it? Or miss? So the dance has drama. It breaks up the frozen forms. So the dance has action. And it gradually unites them. Tossing a ball strings them together. So we have not just solitary figures, but a cast. They morph into a community doing something together. Creating a world never looked so simple. So smart. So fun. So lovely. That's why "Secular" is the work of a master.

The Graham company's third visit to the Soraya ascended to art heaven on the cushion of exquisite live accompaniment by classical musical ensemble **wild Up**, teamed with the Graham company by Soraya Executive Director Thor Steingraber, a man with a mission.

Steingraber said, "Janet reminded me that Graham traveled with musicians, performed with live music, and commissioned new orchestral pieces for many decades. In that spirit, it was important that we repeat the Graham and wild Up partnership this year by supporting a world premiere with live music."

Wildup's aural magic carpet floated from the pit — and the dancers stepped onto it. The ensemble's dance-sensitive founder/composer/conductor, Christopher Rountree, is a vigorous throttler of the crescendo/diminuendo, welling the room with sound and then cranking it down, especially for the delicacies of the Caroline Shaw string quartets (expanded by Rountree for chamber ensemble) that accompanied the Tanowitz piece. In the pretalk, Rountree shared his view that for many of the evening's composers (William Schumann, Robert Starer Irving Fine, and Wallingford Riegger), their best work arguably stemmed from Graham commissions.



"Secular" reached its drollest point with a very appealing woman caught between two less-than-attentive men (to her). The men are interested by each other. This circles the viewer back to the dance's opening moments, indicating that the posing male peacocks were not by accident. With the launch of the Graham company's two-year running EVE Project auguring an exploration of female themes through dance, this moment in "Secular" reads as a little disguised take on the breakup of Graham's marriage to Erick Hawkins. This fillip infuses the dance with memory, emotion and ideas. Imagine all of that ... in one dance!

Broad Street Review

where art and ideas meet

Annenberg Center Live and NextMove Dance present Martha Graham Dance Company's 'The EVE Project'

American Eve

Author: Melissa Strong
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<https://www.broadstreetreview.com/film/annenberg-center-live-and-nextmove-dance-present-martha-graham-dance-compan#>

Martha Graham reportedly once proclaimed that "all great dancing stems from the lonely place." When a student asked where that place is, Graham replied, "Between your thighs. Next question?" This exchange was on my mind when her namesake company performed *The EVE Project*, a collection of works old and new which celebrates the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment by examining aspects of womanhood.



More than a red hem in Martha Graham's 'Chronicle.' (Photo by Brigid Pierce/Hibbard Nash Photography.)

A dance trailblazer, Graham created her own style of movement and approach to choreography, often collaborating with artists in other mediums. Founded in 1926, Martha Graham Dance Company now performs both works by Graham and newly commissioned pieces. At the Annenberg in January, these included three dances by Graham and a preview of a new work by Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jene Smith called *Deo*, which will get its premiere in New York in April.

Continuing influences

The EVE Project proves Graham's continued influence on dance today. Everything that emerged after Graham seems shaped by her work somehow, much like modern dance was shaped by classical ballet even as it rejected formalism, rigidity, and elitism. Rejection also is a response, and it was apparent that Graham's dance vocabulary drew from ballet. The results were visually stunning and expertly danced, leaving me in awe of the choreographer's legacy.

Frenzy, passion, and balance

The first piece, *Diversion of Angels*, premiered in 1948. A plotless dance, it examines aspects of womanhood through different types of love. Graham's costumes suggest this through color: Charlotte Landreau's yellow, So Young An's red, and Natasha M. Diamond-Walker's white reflected youthful frenzy, erotic passion, and mature balance. The lower half of the female dancers' costumes conveyed another form of balance. What looked like a full skirt was revealed to be wide-legged pants, creating an image both masculine and feminine.

There was rapture in An's sky-high kicks and febrile energy in Landreau's grand jetés, capturing the force of a woman's love. Lloyd Mayor literally caught that force just for a moment when Landreau launched her body into the air and landed sitting on his shoulder. Meanwhile, Diamond-Walker imbued balanced love with regal dignity. Her deep, architectural backbends evoked sculpture and Graham's creative collaborations with Isamu Noguchi. *Diversion of Angels* underscored the majesty of her role in its final image, when Diamond-Walker was crowned by the outspread fingers of her male partner.

A living sculpture

Ekstasis followed, a slower-paced solo that might have suffered on a different program with another company. But Graham's repertory includes many solos, such as her signature *Lamentation* (1930). Like *Lamentation*, which the dancer performs inside a tube of material, *Ekstasis* connects movement and confinement with fabric. Anne Souder gave my favorite performance of the evening, creating elegant yet unthinkable moving shapes. Though her feet remained planted in the opening sequence, the movements of her head and hips, breathtakingly spotlit by Nick Hung, riveted my attention.



'Chronicle' boasts choreography and costumes by Martha Graham. (Photo by Brigid Pierce.)

Souder became an animated sculpture with slow, sinuous movements, raising her arms overhead. *Ekstasis* repeated and juxtaposed this image toward the end, when Souder resembled a twisted *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, with upraised limbs and a contorted lower half. In the striking final scene, Souder formed a deep parabola with her body, her torso its axis of symmetry.

A female response to war

The program concluded with *Chronicle*, a dance Graham created in 1936 in response to the rise of fascism. *Chronicle* originally contained five sections; today, the company performs a reconstructed version with three parts. It captures images of and a response to war that struck me as distinctly female. For instance, Xin Ying wore a black dress with a full skirt that initially appeared to have a red hem. This turned out to be a red underskirt, which Ying pulled over her head into a mantle. As drums sounded the call to war, Ying became an embodiment of the bloodshed, inhumanity, and mourning in their aftermath.

The second section introduced a group of dancers in black cap-sleeved dresses who walked backward across the stage in identical poses, with one hand on the shoulder and the other wrapped around the waist. They moved with purpose but without direction, first deliberately and then with haste, like asylum seekers displaced by battle. These figures returned in the last section, their costumes (designed by Graham) contrasting with the white dress of a dancer on a platform. She seemed to draw energy from the others as they leapt in a circle around her, reaching her arms toward them and then pulling her hands to her chest.

The dance revolution

Though I did not enjoy *Chronicle* as much as the other pieces, I blame this on its music rather than its choreography. Wallingford Riegger's *New Dance* sounded outdated, its horns and drums as bombastic as the wooden acting in some old

movies. Graham's choreographic style is more like Lee Strasberg's Method technique, which revolutionized acting the way that Graham revolutionized dance.

Graham is an Eve-like figure in the world of dance: nearly a century ago, she plucked an apple of creative knowledge that continues to reverberate in 2019. Just as modern dance responded to ballet, today's new dances respond to Graham's innovations. *The EVE Project* (with an April run coming up in New York) is a must-see, keeping the legacy of one of the most important choreographers of all time in conversation with emerging dance.



The New York Times

Martha Graham Dance Company's EVE Project Celebrates Female Power

Peter Libbey – June 25, 2018

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/arts/dance/martha-graham-dance-companys-eve-project-celebrates-female-power.html>



Martha Graham's "Diversion of Angels" with, from left, Anne Souder, So Young An and Leslie Andrea Williams. CreditCreditAndrea Mohin/The New York Times

The Martha Graham Dance Company's EVE Project, a two-year initiative, will commemorate the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the power to vote, the company announced on Monday.

As a part of the project, from 2018 to 2020, several female choreographers, including Pam Tanowitz, Maxine Doyle and Bobbi Jene Smith, have been commissioned to create works for the 2018-19 season. (Commissions for the 2019-20 season will be announced in the fall.) The season's repertory offerings will also focus on female power.

"The EVE Project is intended to connect audiences — in the ephemeral and visceral way dance does — to both historical and contemporary ideas of the feminine," Janet Eilber, the artistic director of the company, said in a statement.

Ms. Tanowitz's new piece will receive its world premiere at the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts in Northridge, Calif., in March 2019 before being performed as a part of the Martha Graham Dance Company's two-week engagement at the Joyce Theater in Manhattan in April. Ms. Doyle and Ms. Smith's co-creation will have its debut during the Joyce season.