

# BWW Review: MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY at City Center Thrills with Iconic and New Works

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by [Marina Kennedy](#) Apr. 8, 2022

Martha Graham Dance Company is now on stage as part of the City Center Dance Festival. We attended the production of their Program A that will also be presented on Saturday evening, April 9th. There is also a Program B being presented on Sunday afternoon, April 10th. Those of us who are long time fans along with the newcomers to the Company's repertoire have the opportunity to experience and treasure fabulous works.

In her address, Artistic Director, Janet Eilber greeted the audience saying, "We are so happy to be here in person." She pointed out that it is Martha Graham Dance Company's 96th Season and went on to lend some fascinating insights about the evening's dance pieces.

The program opened with "Chronicle" with choreography and costumes by Martha Graham and music by Wallingford Riegger. This timeless work first premiered in December of 1936 at the Guild Theatre in NYC. The original program note stated, "Chronicle does not attempt to show the actualities of war; rather does it, by evoking war's images, set forth the fateful prelude to war, portray the devastation of spirit which it leaves in its wake, and suggest an answer." The piece is presented in three parts that starts with "Spectre-1914" a mournful dramatic solo that was exquisitely danced by Leslie Andrea Williams wearing a full, flowing black and red costume. The second part, "Steps in the Street" featured Marzia Memoli joined by eleven company members in a piece that depicted the devastation of war, with the tragic effects of homelessness and exile. This part of "Chronicle" showcased the renowned style and precision of the

troupe. The final dance, "Prelude to Action" closed the piece with a sense of hope for unity and a future without conflict. Starting the show with this iconic Martha Graham work with its enduring relevance was ideal.

After a brief intermission, the Company returned with "Canticle for Innocent Comedians." It was inspired by the 1952 work by Martha Graham, with music by Jason Moran, and beautifully patterned flowing costumes by Karen Young. This new dance for the ensemble was conceived by Janet Eilber working with Sonya Tayeh as the Lead Choreographer. Jenn Freeman is the Associate Chorographer. "Canticle for Innocent Comedians" consisted of an Opening and Interludes for the Ensemble by Sonya Tayeh. The eight vignettes by talented choreographers included "Sun" by Sonya Tayeh; "Earth" by Alleyne Dance; "Wind" by Sir Robert Cohan; "Water" by Juliano Nunes; "Fire" by Yin Yue; "Moon" by Martha Graham; "Stars" by Michaela Taylor; and "Death/Rebirth" by Jenn Freeman. The Closing for the piece was also choreographed by Sonya Tayeh. The vignettes, while distinctive, came together seamlessly and displayed the essence of Graham technique throughout.

The final number in the program was "CAVE." This world premiere proved to be an exhilarating surprise and a definite departure from the first two dance works. It features choreography by Hofesh Shechter, assisted by Kim Kohlmann, and the Creative Producer is Daniil Simkin. The music is by AME and Hofesh Shechter with costumes by Caleb Krieg. Clad in modern clothing, the ensemble performed an energetic dance to rhythmic music. The piece showcased the dancers' grace, athleticism, and sense of exuberance. The choreography thrilled with its break-out moves. "CAVE" was toe-tapping, head bobbing joy for the audience that topped off the show.

The extraordinary dancers of the Martha Graham Dance Company includes Lloyd Knight, Xin Ying, Natasha M. Diamond-Walker, Lloyd Mayor, Anne O'Donnell, Lorenzo Pagano, Anne Souder, So Young An, Alessio Crognale, Laurel Dalley Smith, Jacob Larsen, Marzia Memoli, Richard Villaverde, Leslie Andrea Williams, Aoi Sato, Devin Loh,

and Kate Reyes. Special Guest Stars are Jason Moran and Daniil Simkin. The Company's Senior Artistic Associate is Denise Vale.

The impressive array of music for the show is by The Mannes Orchestra, with Conductor, David Hayes. And lighting for the show complemented each dance piece. The lighting design included original lighting for "Chronicle" by Jean Rosenthal with "Steps in the Street" by David Finley and "Spectre-1914" and Prelude to Action" by Steven L. Shelly. Lighting for "Canticle for Innocent Comedians" and 'CAVE" is by Yi-Chung Chen.

Martha Graham was visionary in the world of contemporary dance and the depth of her artistry and influence is being superbly represented by her company at City Center. Don't miss the opportunity to see and feel the finest dance in action. Congratulations to Artistic Director, Janet Eiber and Executive Director, Larue Allen on their successful presentation at the 2022 City Center Dance Festival.