

# The Berkshire Eagle

DANCE REVIEW

## **DANCE REVIEW: At Jacob's Pillow, Martha Graham Dance Company 'gives voice to our need for shared joy, ecstasy, and the compassion'**

By Erica Dankmeyer August 17, 2023



Alessio Crognale-Roberts and Xin Ying in "Errand into the Maze," with Martha Graham Dance Company at Jacob's Pillow Dance.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN PHOTOGRAPHY

BECKET — The Martha Graham Dance Company returns to Jacob's Pillow's Ted Shawn Theatre this week, presenting two of Graham's vividly reimagined distillations of Greek mythology, as well as a new creation, "CAVE," by Hofesh Shechter.

Graham excavates the depths of the female psyche suggested in the ancient myths, depicting protagonists whose intelligence and cunning are rooted in emotional impulses. Caught in the gender binary, she exposes the innate capacities dueling within each of us to both create and destroy.

As the curtain opens on "Errand Into the Maze," absent is the exquisite set by Isamu Noguchi, save for the ropelike "maze;" gone, too, are the original costumes, replaced by Maria Garcia's minimalist designs. As Gian Carlo Menotti's first piano notes plunge us into the depths, Ariadne, performed Wednesday by Xin Ying, launches bravely into this hazy, otherworldly void in her quest to overcome the "Creature of Fear," performed by Alessio Crognale-Roberts. And while some of the choreography cannot convey abandon, nor progress, without Noguchi's threshold to support it, Ying captivates with percussive, arrested contractions that emit the intense labor involved in overcoming personal demons. Made almost more vulnerable by the stark emptiness, she triumphs over alienation through sheer grounded force. Crognale-Roberts, though obscured in a bizarre hood, gains footing with each entrance, grinding through brutal spiraling knee crawls while caught in the yoke.

Presented with the full set and costumes, "Cave of the Heart," Graham's depiction of Medea, brings to mind the ongoing challenge for humans to exist in paradigms of their own making, as toxic masculinity continues to be politically perpetuated. Enveloped in Samuel Barber's spellbinding score, the four dancers through whom Graham distills her vision must investigate the nuances within the archetypes they represent. Yanked from her lover Jason's orbit, Medea, danced by Leslie Andrea Williams, finds the full expression of wrath by squelching Jason's fragile universe. Williams' body torques and twists, her rage and resultant derangement growing, her posture increasingly contorted. As she is seized by horrific impulses rather than histrionics, we can almost see the moment she chooses the unthinkable; her subsequent logic as maniacally methodical as her plunging "cave turns." After destroying the Princess, performed with understated innocence (or knowing?) by Laurel Dalley Smith, Medea gobbles up her own symbolic serpent. "The Chorus," performed by Ane Arrieta with emergent clarity, sweeps the stage in helpless lament.

Graham's tightly controlled choreographic realization of Jason, performed by Lorenzo Pagano, renders hypermasculine attempts to obscure insecurity. Surely he once possessed an emotional life, in order for the complex Medea to have chosen him? With his torso spiraled into "archaic" flatness, his heaving chest exposed, biceps and feet flexed, he is caught in his own web, swallowing personal desires in order to pursue public ambition. Yet Pagano reveals chinks in the armor, suddenly coming to understand consequences. While coiling and roiling in seething anguish,

Medea meanwhile exhibits traditionally “masculine” traits of self-reliance, dominance and competitiveness, choosing revenge and violence as solutions to her abject entrapment as a woman scorned.

Shechter’s “CAVE,” a study of dance club culture, meanders in the dark. Muffled beats, by Æme and Shechter, announce the party through closed doors. Though hard to distinguish in the murky haze, individuals do shine, especially Richard Villaverde. Movement is fleeting, and the collective rapture inherent in simply dancing, feverishly close, is palpable as we consider the lives of the dancers on stage, who have lost parts of a short career to the pandemic. Shechter gives voice to our need for shared joy, ecstasy and the compassion that is the only way to improve our world. Graham’s Medea might agree.

## DANCE REVIEW

**What:** Martha Graham Dance Company

**Where:** Ted Shawn Theatre, Jacob's Pillow Dance, 358 George Carter Road, Becket

**When:** Through Aug. 20

**Performances:** 2 p.m. Aug 18-20, 8 p.m. Aug. 19

**Tickets:** \$60-\$90

**Information and reservations:** 413-243-0745, [jacobspillow.org](http://jacobspillow.org)

