

When the National Endowment for the Arts turned down the Martha Graham Dance Company's application for a challenge grant in 1983, there was an outcry. In 1984 the company was given a film grant of \$250,000 from the NEA Dance Program's special project fund. The first fruits of the film grant were seen in the "Dance in America" program "An Evening of Dance and Conversation with Martha Graham" (PBS, Dec. 14). To judge by this program, Graham's decision to undertake, at this stage in her career, the filming of her works in such a way that the result will not be, in her word, a "travesty," has come too late.

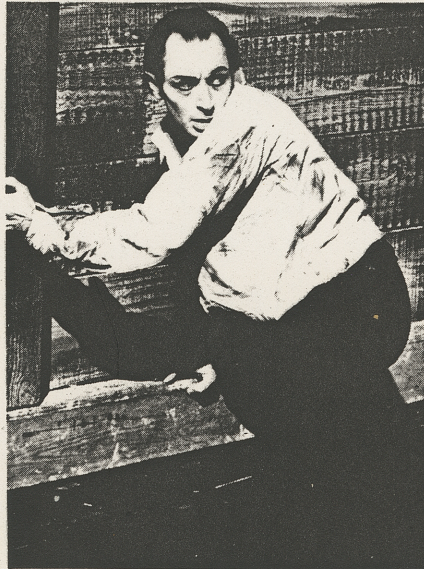
It's not just that the dances (*Errand Into the Maze*, *Cave of the Heart*, "Acts of Light") are poorly filmed—that the camera setups and the editing give little idea of the choreographic structure, and at the same time expose the repetitiousness of the vocabulary. The director, Thomas Grimm, cannot entirely be blamed for the failure to translate the dances into another medium. They are said to have been "reconceived" for television, but this process does not extend to the manner of their performance. None of these dancers can simply do a movement and let it be expressive in itself. They seem to be watching themselves hit the poses rather than finding the inner source of the movement.

As Medea in *Cave of the Heart*, Takako Asakawa is a hoot—her head tilted to one side by her hairdo, her mouth twisted, a makeup like Theda Bara. One does not see such maquillage anywhere today outside the Béjart company. There is something profoundly dated about these pieces—*Cave*, after all, is from the same period as *Mildred Pierce*. The treatment of the male characters especially gives one pause; they are presented as mindless jocks, stomping about with flexed feet. Graham's commentary, however sibylline her utterance, is singularly unenlightening about the dances themselves.

One important product of the tremendous expansion of dance scholarship in recent years has been the study of black dance history, and the consequent recognition of the significance of black dance in our cultural heritage. This subject was explored and celebrated in a four-day conference and festival at Brooklyn Academy of Music in April 1983, "Dance Black America." The film of the same name, directed by D.A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus and shown on PBS on January 25, is a record of selected performances from the festival. (The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, in Louis Johnson's giddy *Fontessa and Friends*, was shot separately elsewhere.)

The film rightly stresses the exuberance

of the occasion and the feeling of pride that it expressed. At the same time, the scholarly aspect of the proceedings is indicated in the use of film clips showing dancers like Katherine Dunham and Earl "Snake Hips" Tucker, as well as unknown performers of the cakewalk and the lindy hop, to preface contemporary reconstructions of their dances. (There's also a glimpse of what appears to be an early form of breakdancing.) The Charles Moore Dance Theater has performed an important service in reviving dances



by Asadata Dafora and Dunham, though the dramatic action of the latter's *Shango* is not too clear in this filmed excerpt. Al Perryman's "Snake Hips" impression looks right, but Leon Jackson's Juba is less convincing.

The most impressive recent choreography is Garth Fagan's *From Before*, danced by his Bucket Dance Theater: a distillation, or abstraction, of Caribbean dance forms, with beautiful moments of stillness (the audience applauded these). It is unfortunate that the film shows nothing of the work of younger, post-modernist black choreographers, which is such an interesting manifestation. (In the festival, Blondell Cummings performed her *Chicken Soup*.) As always, it is a privilege to watch the ineffable Chuck Green spinning out his delicate tap roudades to "Take the A Train."

If, like me, you turn off the television during PBS pledge drives when it's time for a pitch—or if you had blinked—you would have missed Valda Setterfield's appearance in what's called in the trade an "address I.D.," doing thirty seconds' worth of her solo, "constructed" by David Gordon, from Philip Glass' opera *The Photographer*, which was part of BAM's 1983 Next Wave Festival. (The spot was

aired following Baryshnikov's *Nutcracker* on December 8.)

In fact, the whole of this remarkable dance was taped, under the direction of Bob Earing, and in its complete form it is one of the most exquisite pieces of videodance I have ever seen. Earing shot the dance with four cameras (I was reminded that one of the first experiments with dance on television was Antony Tudor's *Fugue for Four Cameras*, for the BBC in 1937), adding one image after another, mixing all four, or layering them by chroma-key superimposition. At other moments Setterfield moves in and out of close-up. The dance is perfect television material because photography is its subject—it's a series of attitudes taken from Eadweard Muybridge's studies of the human figure in motion—and because Setterfield is so photogenic. The camera matches at every moment her unaffected plasticity. This tape should be widely seen.

During November and December the Arts and Entertainment cable network showed two BBC programs. *Cruel Garden* is a collaboration between the choreographer Christopher Bruce and the mime Lindsay Kemp, originally done as a theater piece by Ballet Rambert in 1977 and adapted for television under Colin Nears' direction in 1982, when it won a Prix d'Italia. It is based on the life and writings of Federico García Lorca, with Bruce himself as the Poet. He also figures in tableaux suggesting the Crucifixion and a Pietà, which makes one wonder about his idea of Lorca, to say nothing of his own self-image. When I add that in one section, based on a film scenario Lorca wrote for Buster Keaton, Bruce appears as that great comedian, with "eyes infinitely sad" (I quote)—in other words, as Keaton sentimentalized, Chaplinized—I have said all I can bear to about *Cruel Garden*.

Classically Cuban is a documentary about Alicia Alonso and the Cuban National Ballet, a 1981 co-production with Cuban Television, directed by Michael Dibb. Alonso, whose earlier career is described by herself in interviews, and illustrated by stills and movie-clips, has become a quintessential *monstre sacré*, with her inch-long fingernails and her mouth a scarlet wound. But there is no doubt that she has achieved something extraordinary in Cuba, establishing classic ballet in a socialist country where it had hardly existed before (unlike Soviet Russia). This is partly because her company is the only major ballet company in the West whose racial makeup reflects that of the society. If the modern choreography they dance is pretty terrible, isn't that true almost everywhere?

DAVID VAUGHAN

Christopher Bruce as the Poet in *Cruel Garden*, seen on the A&E cable network