

# The New York Times

DANCE

## Review: For the Martha Graham Company, Opposites Attract

By **SIOBHAN BURKE** APRIL 12, 2018



Laurel Dalley Smith and Ari Mayzick in Lucinda Childs's newly expanded "Histoire," which had its premiere on Wednesday night with the Martha Graham Dance Company. Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

To its credit, the 92-year-old Martha Graham Dance Company is not beholden to its founder's style. In recent years, as the company has broadened its repertory to include non-Graham works — one approach to staying vital — it has entertained the notion that opposites attract. The dry restraint favored by someone like Annie-B Parson couldn't be further from Graham's effusive theatricality, yet the troupe thrived in Ms. Parson's ["The Snow Falls in the Winter"](#) in 2015. One of the most successful "Lamentation Variations" (reinventions of Graham's 1930 "Lamentation") was [a 2012 iteration by Yvonne Rainer](#), who, as a founder of the 1960s collective Judson Dance Theater, rejected much of what Graham and her cohort championed.

For its [current City Center season](#), which opened on Wednesday, the company seemed poised to offer a similar study in contrasts, presenting a [newly expanded version of Lucinda Childs's "Histoire"](#) alongside Graham's 1958 "Embattled Garden" and the

company premiere of Lar Lubovitch's "The Legend of Ten" (2010). A titan of postmodern dance, Ms. Childs, also a founding member of Judson, is well known for her crystalline minimalism and mathematical imagination, which arranges dance steps like fractals. She first created "Histoire" as a duet for the Graham company in 1999, to music by the Polish composer Krzysztof Knittel. Though still anchored by that duet, it now features eight dancers and additional music by Astor Piazzolla.



Lorenzo Pagano, top, and Lloyd Knight in Martha Graham's "Embattled Garden." Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

What's surprising about "Histoire" is not how different it is from Graham but how alike. More than pushing the company into unfamiliar terrain, it shows a side of Ms. Childs that we rarely see, still severe but more emotionally driven. While there's no explicit story here, there is a definite concern with human relationships; these are not just people as forms in space, but also people with feelings for one another.

While this form-feeling tension is interesting to think about, “Histoire” enchants only fleetingly, mostly as it builds momentum toward the end, whisked along by the tango-inflected music. By that point the valiant central pair — Laurel Dalley Smith and Ari Mayzick — have joined with the work’s three other couples in an onrush of turns, lifts and near-collisions that break through the stiffness of earlier sections. When the couples part, with the men and women exiting in opposite directions, they look past each other as if, for all they’ve been through, they haven’t quite connected.

In a sense “[The Legend of Ten](#),” to Brahms’s Quintet in F minor, picked up where “Histoire” left off, with a breathy sweep that the 10 dancers maintained throughout — but only after Mr. Lubovitch, whose own troupe turns 50 this year, received the 2018 Martha Graham Award. (The award, founded by Graham, was discontinued after her death in 1991 and reinstated this year.) “Legend” demonstrates the kind of playful energy and inventive mind needed to sustain a modern dance career for five decades.

The dancers seemed to still be settling into Mr. Lubovitch’s fluid movement, which has a downward pull more buoyant than Graham’s. In terms of technique, they were more in their element in “Embattled Garden,” which opened the program. Yet no matter how stunningly performed, and even with the refreshing addition of live music, this foray into the Garden of Eden with a cast of four and a vibrant Isamu Noguchi set feels stuck in a different time. The awkwardly paced effort to contextualize the work — a video and slide show juxtaposing old and new versions, difficult to see under the still-dimming house lights — didn’t make it feel any more alive. The Graham repertory on other programs this season — like “Panorama” and “Chronicle,” two pieces with more staying power — may fare better.

***Correction: April 19, 2018***

*An earlier version of this review incorrectly described an award. The award is called the Martha Graham Award, not the Martha Graham Award for Lasting Impact to the Field of Dance.*

Martha Graham Dance Company  
Through Saturday at City Center, Manhattan; 212-581-1212, [nycitycenter.org](http://nycitycenter.org).

A version of this review appears in print on April 14, 2018, on Page C2 of the New York edition with the headline: Pushing Through Unfamiliar Terrain

[https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/arts/dance/review-martha-graham-dance-company-city-center.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FGraham%2C%20Martha%2C%20Dance%20Company&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/arts/dance/review-martha-graham-dance-company-city-center.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FGraham%2C%20Martha%2C%20Dance%20Company&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection)