

Noted Pair Give Dance Program

BY ISABEL MORSE JONES

Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman, superior American dancers in the modern manner, came to Los Angeles last night. With a company of fifteen they gave a program of attention-holding variety. These two, who can be credited with a new dance movement that is strictly American, began their studies with Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn when their school flourished. Abandoning the batik and incense phase early, they developed into alert choreographers aware of the American scene. They have the gift of keen observation and they are high-ranking interpretative artists.

NATURAL GRACE

Miss Humphrey is frail looking, the artist type. She has natural grace of body and she has refined her instrument with hard work. She moves like the wind in widening spaces. Weidman is strong and expertly controlled. The company is well rehearsed but each member has a particular individuality of his own. The faces are not repellant masks but are expressive of the current pantomime. The costuming is simple in line, economical in cut and opulent in color. The music is perfect for the dance portrayal and it has obviously been chosen by the musically intelligent. Composers Brahms, Lehman, Slonimsky and Wallingford Riegger contributed. A piano and some unobtrusive percussion instruments were used to advantage.

BASED ON PSYCHOLOGY

The choreography of "Traditions" is definitely based on a psychological study but it was neither austere nor dull at any time. Habits of thought were exhibited in motion. The audience recognized its own foibles and laughed at the mirror which exhibited them. And yet it was abstract and there was no direct representation of ideas. "Traditions" is an achievement in that it allows the dance art to stand on its own feet in the realm of mind.

"Exhibition Piece" is the most delightful satire on ballet display that we have had so far. Three dancers, absurdly romantic and gotten up in the mauve and black velvet which characterizes the decade in which ladies swooned and gallants caught them, gave a performance of rare delicacy and point.

PRINCIPAL NUMBER

"Theater Piece" was the principal concert number of the evening. It might have been termed, "Whither are we going?" Termed a dance of experience, it comprised the various competitions in which man and woman are engaged and tops them with an idealistic vision of faith danced by Miss Humphrey that made despair and chaos unreal. There was delicious humor in the "Stadium" and the "pursuit of the male" and again in the theater scene where the jazz babies and the pretending dramatists strive for the great goal, publicity.

The concluding variations from the New Dance were monotonous but probably were of technical interest to the initiates. The Humphrey-Weidman dancers bring us an American art expression that has the spice of humor and the dignity of truth.

DANCE IN REVIEW

Miss Humphrey's "Theatre Piece" An Artist's Conception of Today

BY HENRY PLEASANTS

THE American modern dance has produced nothing at once so impressive and so encouraging as "Theatre Piece," introduced Saturday afternoon to an eager and appreciative audience in the Academy of Music by Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and their Dance Groups in a benefit for the Philadelphia Committee for Prevention of Blindness. The choreography is by Miss Humphrey who has, in the past, repeatedly shown herself to be a composer of uncommon perception, individuality and creative imagination. None of her earlier dances in large forms, however, has attained quite the maturity of "Theatre Piece," or its sustained lyric quality and shrewd sense of theatrical values.

This is the more surprising in view of the subject matter. "Theatre Piece" is the first in a trilogy of large scale dances concerned with social relationships. It is "a dance of experience in a place of conflict and competition," showing the world "as it is today." The other components of the trilogy are "New Dance" designed to show the world "as it should be," and "My Red Fires," dealing with the relationship between man and woman within the social schemes. This is delicate material for the lyric artist. Only the most gifted and imaginative can steer it clear of the snares of pretentiousness and present a personal point of view in a manner which will be compelling to others.

Miss Humphrey is obviously thus gifted. However much she may be concerned with the qualities of the world about her, she expresses herself with so much artistic imagination and with such a sure command of lyric forms that the subject promptly assumes an absorbing dramatic character. There is no suggestion of preaching here in the ordinary sense. Miss Humphrey is

obviously pointing a moral, but she conveys her message with the dignity, restraint and insight becoming an artist and a cultivated woman.

Throughout the dance Miss Humphrey is the solo figure, a rebel against the competitive scheme of things, played off with splendid structural effect against the group. The latter, also in contrapuntal style, caricature the world in business, in love, in sport and in the theatre. A setting of blocks is used for extraordinary scenic effects obtained with stunning simplicity. The caricature is pointed, often grotesque, and always imaginative.

There is nothing episodic about the piece. The various sections are welded together with the master craftsman's ability to do the right thing at the right time, and the joints are so fashioned that one is hardly aware of them. Miss Humphrey's elaborate solo dance, "Interlude" conveying a theme of "harmony and peace" is a model of lyric invention, and has a firm unifying effect, preparing the composition for the coda when "the group is suddenly brought out of its theatre-acting by the call to something new" and the dance ends "on a hushed note of expectancy."

The program also contained the Variations and Conclusion from "New Dance," which was not enough to convey a clear idea of the quality of the work, and a number of shorter pieces including the satiric "Exhibition Piece" and Mr. Weidman's familiar "Traditions." The splendidly trained and disciplined group danced exceedingly well, and with a unity of spirit and purpose which suggested that Miss Humphrey's ideal of "a modern brotherhood of man" might have a basis in proven reality.

