

# DANCE *st.* NEWS

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## **CENTENE CORPORATION AND DANCE ST. LOUIS PRESENT MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY AT TOUHILL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, OCTOBER 14 & 15, 2011**

ST. LOUIS, September 27, 2011....Dance St. Louis and Centene Corporation bring the Martha Graham Dance Company back to St. Louis for the first time in 20 years to spotlight the legacy of its legendary founder—Martha Graham, the “mother of modern dance”—at the Touhill Performing Arts Center at 8 p.m. on Friday, October 14, and 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. on Saturday, October 15.

The performances span nearly a century of Graham: from *Prelude and Revolt* featuring her earliest works of the 1920s and '30s, to her beloved classic *Appalachian Spring*, to the new *Lamentation Variations* created by contemporary choreographers inspired by her work.

Tickets range from \$35 to \$50 for Friday and Saturday evening. All seats are \$30 for the Saturday matinee. Tickets are available at the Dance St. Louis box office at 3547 Olive St. in the Centene Center for Arts and Education in Grand Center, by calling 314-534-6622, or by visiting [dancestlouis.org](http://dancestlouis.org).

Dance St. Louis Artistic & Executive Director Michael Uthoff will host a free program, *Speaking of Dance*, in the Touhill's Terrace Lobby at 7:15 p.m. prior to the 8 p.m. performances and at 1:15 p.m. prior to the Saturday 2 p.m. performance. He will also host an informal post-performance conversation, *Speak Easy*, also in the Terrace Lobby, immediately after the shows.

Martha Graham Dance Company is part of the American Arts Experience—St. Louis.

Groundbreaking American dancer, choreographer, and teacher, Martha Graham is one of the seminal artists of the 20th century. Her radical influence has been compared to Pablo Picasso in art, James Joyce in literature, Igor Stravinsky in music, and Frank Lloyd Wright in architecture. Over Graham's eight-decade career, she forever changed the way dancers move, with her earth-centered, emotionally acute choreography. Key to her style is her principle of “contraction and release”—the tension of contracted muscles, especially in the pelvis, and the flow of energy as the muscles relax. This gives her dances a percussive strength and a sharp, angular look, strikingly different from the airborne ideals of classical ballet.

Graham was inspired by a wide variety of sources, including modern painting, American Indian religious ceremonies, Greek mythology, and the American frontier. She infused her dances with dramatic emotions and sexual tension. She once said of her work, “I wanted to begin not with the characters or ideas, but with movements...I did not want it to be beautiful or fluid. I wanted it to be fraught with inner meaning, with excitement and surge.”

Graham influenced generations of choreographers including Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp. She was the first to integrate her group, casting African-Americans and Asians in her principal company. Classical ballet dancers Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Baryshnikov sought her out to broaden their artistry. She taught actors including Bette Davis, Kirk Douglas, Liza Minnelli, Gregory Peck, and Madonna to use their bodies as expressive instruments.

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Born in 1894 near Pittsburgh, Graham founded her company in 1926. When she died in 1991 at the age of 96 (two months after her company last performed in St. Louis), she had recently created her 181st dance and was working on a new one. During the Bicentennial she was granted the United States' highest civilian honor, The Medal of Freedom. In 1998, *TIME* Magazine named her the "Dancer of the Century," and *People* Magazine named her one of the "Icons of the Century."

The St. Louis program opens with *Prelude and Revolt*, a special multi-media work that includes not only live dance but archival photos and film clips. *Prelude and Revolt* provides the rare opportunity to see early dances by Graham as well as by her mentors Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, whose works are now seldom performed but who were a profound influence on Graham when she rebelled against their style.

Among Graham's revolutionary works performed in *Prelude and Revolt* is her 1927 solo *Lamentation*—the source for the newest work on the St. Louis program, *Lamentation Variations*, commissioned in 2007 to commemorate the 9/11 attacks. Contemporary choreographers Larry Keigwin, Richard Move, and Bulareyaung Pagarlava were inspired by a film of Graham performing *Lamentation* in the early 1930s. *Lamentation* embodies grief, performed by a solo woman encased in a tube of stretching fabric from which only her face, her hands and her bare feet emerge.

After the sorrows of *Lamentation Variations*, the program concludes on a joyous note with what has become Graham's most popular work, *Appalachian Spring*, her luminous portrait of a pioneer wedding. Graham created *Appalachian Spring* in 1944 in close collaboration with composer Aaron Copland, who drew on American folk tunes including the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts" for his transcendent score, and sculptor Isamu Noguchi, whose bare-bones set eloquently evokes the landscape of the American frontier. Graham herself incorporated square dance patterns into her characteristic moves. Copland said that his music and Graham's dance "had to do with the pioneer American spirit, with youth and spring, with optimism and hope."

As the Martha Graham Dance Company celebrates its 85th Anniversary Season tour, it is hailed as "one of the seven wonders of the artistic universe" (*Washington Post*). By embracing a vision that showcases masterpieces by Graham and her contemporaries alongside newly commissioned works by contemporary artists inspired by Graham's work, the programs unite choreographers across time.

The company has been directed since 2005 by Janet Eilber, a former principal dancer who had worked closely with Graham and danced many of Graham's own greatest roles. Eilber has also performed in films, on television, and on Broadway directed by such greats as Agnes deMille and Bob Fosse and has received four Lester Horton Awards for her reconstruction and performance of seminal American modern dance.

Ameren is Dance St. Louis' 2011-2012 season presenting sponsor. Dance St. Louis is supported by the Arts and Education Council, Missouri Arts Council, Regional Arts Commission, Mid-America Arts Alliance, and National Endowment for the Arts. American Airlines is the official airline.