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# May O'Donnell: Modern Dance Pioneer

*Marian Horosko*

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**May O'Donnell: Modern Dance Pioneer** Marian Horosko
The story of how modern dance developed in America as told by one of its premier performers, teachers, and choreographers.

May O’Donnell (1906-2004) was one of the Martha Graham Contemporary Dance Company’s most successful soloists during its pioneer days. Because of her strong presence and equally strong technique, Graham entrusted O’Donnell to create her own roles in such notable Graham works as *Appalachian Spring* and *Hériodiade*. As a choreographer, O’Donnell was the first American to create dances of musical abstraction (before such a word was used in the world of dance), freeing the modern dancer from themes, storylines, and dramatic passion. She was also a sought-after teacher, and her famous students include Robert Joffrey, Ben Vereen, Gerald Arpino, Dudley Williams, and many others. Today, more than 50 of her documented works are performed and her technique is taught throughout Europe and the United States. Based on extensive interviews with O’Donnell herself, Marian Horosko brings the story of this extraordinary yet unheralded 60-year career to light for the first time. O’Donnell’s personal memories—from her early training in California, to tours with José Limón, to the creation of her signature work, *Suspension*, to her collaborations with composer-husband Ray Green—and unpublished photographs from the artist’s personal archives provide a first-hand account of American modern dance coming into its own during the crucial period of the 1920s through the1980s. Horosko has also included the first available syllabus of O’Donnell’s technique as an intermediate class.

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