

tive numbers, among which is the noteworthy musical double exposure of Paul Muni's fitful sleep just before the commando raid begins.

Two Hollywood films by foreign directors who used to be very careful about their musical backgrounds in the old days proved musically disappointing. *I Married A Witch* by René Clair using a super-fancy, Hollywood score cribbed largely from *L'Apprenti Sorcier*, and that of Hitchcock's *Shadow of A Doubt* with its creepy harmonizations of the Merry Widow waltz were both conventional and without character. I don't suppose these films with their unusual plot material could afford to tread further on audiences' toes by employing screwy scores too.

THEATRE

Sidney Kingsley's *The Patriots*, about the American 1780's, used the device of period curtain music to put the audience into an eighteenth century frame of mind.

Played in the pit by what sounded like a quartet of piano, violin, 'cello and clarinet doubling with flute, the music by the young English composer, Stanley Bate, and the arrangements of Mozart and the rest were not very telling. Bate's original pieces in an English folksongy vein are charming and well wrought but not particularly suited for the theatre and call for a hearing under more favorable conditions. His stretto piece on *Yankee Doodle*, a tune which probably can't be done without in a play about the early days of the republic, was not very effective.

The Skin Of Our Teeth, Thornton Wilder's polyhistoric human circus also uses special curtain music. Some itinerant musicians appear in the aisle before the show, with accordion, clarinet and drums and give a funny slap-dash rendering of familiar circus numbers. It is too bad there is not more room for music in this piece, for at times it seemed to need an imaginative score to point up the fantasy.

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

LA MERI and her Natya Dancers are presenting ethnological recitals: dances from Spain (both regional and gypsy), dances from North Africa, North and South India, Ceylon, Burma, Java, the Philippines, China, the West Indies, the Argentine, and maybe I've left out a few. The recitals are informative and very pleasant. Informative, because La Meri knows the authentic steps, gestures, and poses and reproduces them clearly; they are in fact easier to identify

when she does them than when the exotics do, themselves. She arranges them in simple and straightforward dances, set to native music (recorded) and in authentic costumes. She shows you the technical detail, she gives you the flavor of the style, and she adds a dash of the local theatrical manner.

Everybody knows that the various dance technics are in their highest forms mutually exclusive. Even in our own tradition, no star is personally expressive

in both ballet and modern. It seems as if a life-long concentration in one type of carriage gives a great artist her freedom of dance rhythm, the spontaneity of movement that dances over the music; or looking at it in another way the complete plastic expressivity of the body in motion. La Meri knows this as well as anyone. She does not pretend to dance with the concentration of carriage that such specialists have. She indicates rather than actually expresses the plastic relation of trunk and limb. She indicates, she suggests the initial phase of a movement in the trunk, and executes its final phase, especially in arm or hand gesture. By decreasing, so to speak, the pressure behind a gesture, by being completely clear about its final shape, she presents the latter with extraordinary distinctness. And gets the full value of her marvelous wrist. I had the impression that in her Indian dancing specifically, she presents the hand-pose (the *mudra*) as the point of emphasis of a gesture; rather than as a confusingly complex ornament that flowers from an impulse in the torso, sometimes emphatic, sometimes not. Similarly, that she arranges her Indian dancing in a prevalent 4-4 time, rather than in the polyrhythmic variety that is interesting but also confusing to an occidental eye. By not forcing herself beyond what is possible, she remains an easy and graceful dancer. You see exactly what she means, and you are grateful that there is no faking of great art about the presentation.

La Meri does not compete as an artist with the austerity of elegance that the greatest Eastern dancers alone in the world attain to; or the uncompromisingly taut carriage of which only the great Spaniards are capable; the abruptness of

a *Gaucha*; the brilliant exuberance of a Polynesian. But she evokes the images of them, and that was her intention. And it is a great pleasure, far away from the exotic dancers as we are here. I was particularly happy to watch her Hawaiian numbers; for the Polynesian dance style is one of the purest delights in the world, and the natives we see in nightclubs look as miserable when they dance as if they were caged in a zoo.

La Meri presents herself as the American she is, and now and then she perhaps turns on the American charm a little. But her modesty toward the question of art, her vast information, her ease and good sense are worth remarking on. I noticed with pleasure too that the girls she has taught are natural on the stage, and easy. They are different one from another, and they express more pleasure in dancing than groups generally do. It is a credit to La Meri as a teacher.

At the Academy of Swing, a title I did not think particularly auspicious, I saw a lecture recital by Asata Dafora, the author of the two very interesting African dance dramas of some years ago. I found the performance exceptionally fine. Dafora's subject was the variety of mood and the variety of movement in African Negro dancing. His dances, alone and with two excellent partners, Clementine Blunt and Bessie Nowell, illustrated his point convincingly. They were mostly dances from Sierra Leone. I thought I recognized as the basis of the style the dance-carriage that we know from our own Negro dancing; the lightness of the arms in clear contrast with the solidity of the trunk, the slight forward bend in the hips, the open chest, the calm shoulders, and the neck that holds the head free of the dancing body.

But Dafora's dancing showed that the West African tradition has developed all sorts of variations in the expression of this carriage; and highly diversified gestures, especially in the arms and hands. Whatever the historical process, Dafora's dancing presented a homogeneous style. It is a theatrical rather than a communal or folk form. As he said, not every African can dance, some just like to look and clap their hands. And he did a very attractive number with a stick, explaining that it had been invented by a great dancer of the past as a gesture of thanks for the gift of a very handsome stick.

All this was interesting, but the joy of the performance was the way Dafora danced. He has of course the verve that makes Negro dancing such a pleasure. But he has, too, the precision and freedom of rhythm, the differentiation of gesture, the impetus of movement, and a modesty and sweetness of expression that are all of them the qualities of a great dancer. There is no showing off about it. He, his partners, and his two drummers Coco and Aubucha created the kind of atmosphere a dance lover is happy to be in. I understand he will appear toward the end of the month in a Negro dance program organized by

Wilson Williams in New York Times Hall, in which Belle Rosette, Pearl Primus, and Randolph Scott will also be included.

Dafora's costumes made by Mrs. Dafora were authentic. I especially admired a blue skirt he wore showing dive bombers and a pennant inscribed "Victory."

The Russian short film *A Nation Dances* presented a series of Russian folk dances performed at a dance festival at the beginning of the war. The numbers seemed to have been tidied up a bit for the sake of superficial musical precision; but even so they were danced with the wonderful impetuosity Russian dancers have. Interesting were the counter-rhythms in the Ukrainian dance. But best of all I liked the three male dancers from Astrakhan who vibrated their outstretched arms in a gesture that had a passionate formalization, a haughtiness that was strikingly Asiatic. Even seen in a movie it was terrifyingly in earnest.

In a color short about southern Mexico, I was happy to find the Las Plumas dance of Oaxaca, with its enormous headdresses set with feathers and mirrors, and its beautiful swimming movement, a dance of leaps and crouching turns in 3-4 time to a tune in 4-4.

OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

ROY HARRIS' new *Fifth Symphony*, dedicated to the Soviet Union, was given an important world premiere over N.B.C. by Koussevitzky and the Boston orchestra. It is a challenging work and easily the best war piece this country has yet produced.

Comparison with the Shostakovich *Seventh* is inevitable. In my opinion, the Shostakovich runs a very poor second. The three movements of the Harris symphony are completely different in character and content, but strongly related in style and texture,