

IN THE THEATRE

By VIRGIL THOMSON

ANOTHER NEGROID OPERA

THE first act of *Denmark Vesey*, an opera by Paul Bowles and Charles-Henri Ford, was presented in concert form at the Composers' Forum. It was successful and impressive. The subject is historical, a Negro slave-revolt that took place in Charleston before the Civil War. Text and setting are happily united. Mr. Ford's verse is fanciful, skillful, and charming, his first-act exposition smooth and continuous. It is good poetry and good theatre. Mr. Bowles's musical setting shows also fancy, charm, and no mean skill. The melodies are suave, the declamation is clear, the act-structure solid and forceful. The whole work shows talent and serious collaboration (much-abused word, little-practised art).

I think the Negro cast was a mistake, both the stylistic and the intellectual advantages of a non-Negro point of view about a Negro subject being completely lost when presented by Negro actors. One had hoped that the performances of *Porgy and Bess* might have shown authors and composers the folly of trying to get out of Negroes any real enthusiasm for white-man-made art about Negroes. In spite of unquestioned good-will on both the authors' and the interpreters' part, a dichotomy of understanding takes place which weakens the presentation. And a social resentment is quickly produced (it was obvious the other evening in the forum-questions offered from Negroes in the audience) that tends to vitiate even the good-will involved.

It is not as if the subject-matter were some far-off legend with only symbolic or metaphorical reference to present times. The struggle of the American Negro to obtain *from* the American white man social freedom and economic independence is a very poignant part of every Negro's life and experience. If he is to tell that story in public, he must be expected (and allowed) to tell it from a Negro point of view and with the passionate prej-

udice of one who has suffered, not as a professional musician lending his special gifts of Negroidness as local color to the presentation of what is (however friendly) after all a white man's faraway and poetic point of view about it all. The Negro invariably sounds insincere in such a position and his presence is of no advantage either to his race or to the work.

WITH THE DANCERS

EDWIN DENBY

BALANCHINE AGAIN; DEBUT OF THE CARAVAN

NOW that the Metropolitan does have a ballet masterpiece in its repertory—one as good as the very best of the Monte Carlo—there's a conspiracy of silence about it. It's true people ignored this ballet last year, too, when it came out, but I think they'd better go again, because they are likely to enjoy it very much. It's the Stravinsky-Balanchine *Apollon* I mean, which the Metropolitan is repeating this year, and which it does very well, even to playing the music beautifully.

It is a ballet worth seeing several times because it is as full of touching detail as a Walt Disney, and you see new things each time. Did you see the way Balanchine shows you how strangely tall a dancer is? She enters crouching and doesn't rise till she is well past the terrifically high wings; then she stands up erect, and just standing still and tall becomes a wonderful thing. Did you see how touching it can be to hold a ballerina's extended foot? The three Muses kneel on one knee and each stretches her other foot up, till Apollo comes and gathers the three of them in his supporting hand. Did you notice how he teaches them, turning, holding them by moments to bring each as far as the furthest possible and most surprising beauty; and it isn't for his sake or hers, to show off or be attractive, but only for the sake of that extreme human possibility of balance, with a faith in it as impersonal and touching as a mathematician's faith in an extreme of human reasoning. And did you notice the counter-movement, the keenness of suspense, within the clear onward line of Caliope's variation (what the moderns call the spatial multiplicity