

# 'Anancy' lives also in Ghana's Little Theatre

by...

MARINA MAXWELL

**G**OT Rex Nettleford, Resident Tutor, UCWI Extra-Mural Dept., dancer, choreographer, Chairman of the Standing Conference of Youth Organization talking about his trip to Africa last week.

This must have been particularly interesting to someone like Rex who was one of the three on the UCWI team investigating the Rastafarian problem in Jamaica and turning out the recent report.

Attending the International Conference of WAY, World Assembly of Youth in Ghana, he found time for plenty else. On his way to Accra he went through England and managed to quickly choreograph a whole musical review for the Oxford University Group "The Worcestershire Buskins" — a group he used to dance with when he was at Oxford. Had to rush away before opening night at Lyric House and Vilna Cupidon, a protegee of the Baxter group, studying in England, took over.

But to Africa! "Ghana was wonderful" says Rex. Here the theatre in him takes over and he is excited about the "late nights" spent with a group of dancers after conference meetings. He taught them basic techniques and "in return" he says "they took me around and I really saw Africans dance! "You should see the EWU . . . it's very similar to what Lavinia Williams did here last summer, based on Haitian folk-lore! The same contraction of the pelvis through to the spine. And I saw a lot of this in Martha Graham's work too . . ."

Excited, he got up to illustrate . . . his dark arms outstretched, his face intense . . . "Contract . . . release . . . see it . . . the very same movement we have in the West Indies!"

Out of this link with the emergent theatre in Ghana, came invitations to give talks on Radio Ghana. He spoke on the West Indian society and Politics in the West Indies and also joined a Forum with members of the Arts Council to discuss "The Place of the Performing Arts in National Development".

## Firm self-confidence

● He also found time to see work done by the Experimental Theatre group in Accra. "What I saw was based on Anancy! The same legend we have out here is at the centre of their folk-lore and as a result of their theatre. There is no formal theatre really but the experimental group has been really working! The productions are unsophisticated but very charming" He feels that with Accra becoming a modern town and with the emergence of a class of middleclass Africans and European technicians this type of entertainment will find an outlet and develop much more.

"But what thrilled me completely was the self-confidence of the people! I met people from every part of African life from politics to art and all of them talk politics, live politics and usually understand what they are talking about! It was good to see it — a young country, rediscovering the African personality! The clash of traditionalism and the West is the source of a dynamism you feel as you enter the country".

There is a great deal to be done still "in terms of modern pretensions" he says for "the JU JU man (Obeah man) is still very very important!"

"NKRUMAH HAS DONE A FIRST-CLASS JOB GHANA COULD HAVE EASILY BEEN ANOTHER CONGO! THE ASHANTI ARISTOCRACY DESPISED NKRUMAH FROM EARLY AND WIT TRIBALISM SO MUCH PART OF AFRICAN LIFE, VERY STRONG PARTY W NECESSARY . . . ANI VERY STRONG SENSE NATIONALISM ESSENT JAMAICANS ACCUSTOMED TO A TWO PARTY SYSTEM WILL FIND IT VERY STRANGE . . . BUT CIRCUMSTANCES ARE DIFFERENT AND CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE THE MEANS OF ACHIEVEMENT. TODAY IN GHANA THE "O SAGYEFO" IS GREATLY REVERED".

What in the name of heaven does O SAGYEFO mean, pray?" I asked. "It means 'The Warrior Who Has Conquered' he laughed "It is the official title of the President — Nkrumah."

## Vital ideas

● Of course the Congo came up and the role of O SAAGG . . . oh dear! I mean the O SAGYEFO!

"Well of course, Ghana is the god-father of Pan-Africanism" Rex said "and Nkrumah is taking every opportunity to play the role of the great moderating influence. You should see the effect in the streets of Ghana, posters all over the place — "Support Your Soldiers", "Help A Great Cause" . . . one got the impression of World War II being fought all over again. I have one reservation about this although I can see the link with Nationalism, but with the need for economic development in Ghana, I wonder if so much of the man-power should be sent out to fight in the Congo"

And we finally got around to the Conference. And again I heard the phrase "Rediscovery of the African Personality" cropping up. Linked with it was "The Pledge to Positive Neutrality".

These, Rex says are two of the vital ideas in Africa today . . . and they were reflected in the Conference sharply.

"Do you know that during the

Conference, the African delegation went so far as to form its own African Youth Movement in Accra! It nearly broke up the Conference too!"

"This sprang from the idea of positive neutrality; you see, the conference was attended by 80 delegates of W.A.Y. from different countries . . . but the Communist youth have their own WFDY, World Federation of Democratic Youth and were not represented at WAY of course. The Africans were impatient with the Conference all through since they are firm about not getting mixed up with East-West relationship fights. So the Africans felt that WAY was inadequate for their cause. Ghana led this break-away . . . but they

didn't carry the whole African bloc of delegates so it fell through".

"Another very vocal group was the Latin American delegation" he said.

## Resolutions

I couldn't help thinking that it was the emergent and young countries who were showing some spunk. And I wondered about the West Indies . . . and

how long it would be before we had something Positive and National to say . . .

● But Rex was still talking and I had to stop day-dreaming . . . "There were twelve major resolutions passed by the Youth Conference. The first was in full support of the Cuban Revolution and the Cuban Government's attempt to bring about an Agrarian Reform and to raise the standard of living in Cuba. The conference also condemned foreign interference in the country".

He read from the folder before him "the conference also wishes to declare that the Prin-

ciples of the Revolution are a positive element in the effort by the countries of Latin America to achieve full sovereignty".

The second resolution was about the Congo — it condemns Belgium for the "Moral injury caused to the Congolese people" and its military intervention "as totally unacceptable and endangering the peace of the world". It also called on the "U.N. to enforce respect for the sovereignty of the Congolese nation by all nations by refusing to tolerate any intervention in the Congo".

I couldn't help day-dreaming off a little here again . . . about

NETLEFORD, R

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the young West Indian . . . anyway, at least young people somewhere in the world were thinking!

The other resolutions concerned Panama and freedom from America's flag, Dictatorial government in Paraguay, Kenya's demand for a uniform system of law against the detention of Jomo Kenyatta, black Kenya's leader, an enquiry into South Africa by delegates of WAY, against Apartheid, that South West Africa should have its own administration, against France's policy in Algeria, Berlin and re-unification of Germany and the role of youth in Germany to keep fighting, against anti-semitism and against Nuclear Tests in the Sahara.

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*REX NETTLEFORD, Resident Tutor of the UCWI Extra-Mural Department dancer and choreographer, illustrating Basic Technique to a young African Dance Group in Accra, Ghana. He found time to teach them and to learn a lot from them after hours of the World Assembly of Youth Conference which he attended in his capacity as Chairman of the Standing Conference of Youth Organization in Jamaica.*

Sunday Cleaner, Oct. 2, 1960.