

# LONDON

## *Disapproves*

### *Breaking With Tradition— A Heart-Rending Business*

MADAME LA MERI.

It sounded rather frightening—a mixture of Pavlova and Melba and Aimee Macpherson. Instead, the person who greeted me in the Hotel St. George lounge had a little girl's face and a scarlet ribbon in her hair, tied in a not-too-careful bow on top. Which shows how little you can rely on names. (One of the nicest people I know in Sydney is saddled with the name of Winklebottom.)

La Meri is a dancer, a very good dancer, and she is now twinkling an amazing pair of feet at the Grand Opera House in Wellington. She's keenly interested in the evolution of the dance. "It gives me a positive delight," she said, "to discover any affinity between the various types of choreography. I've found a kinship between the dances of the natives of the Pacific, and now I'm anxious to get my clutches on, your Maoris and discover whether their dances have anything in common with the dances of the Hawaiians and the Tahitians. Studying racial characteristics through the medium of dancing is one of my most lasting joys."

Madame is an American—well, 99 per cent. American, she says. Her mother and father were Americans, her grandparents hailed from Wales, Scotland and Spain. "But I was brought up on the Mexican Border, and there you eat, drink, think and sleep Spanish. Nevertheless, I'm an American—don't forget that!"

We talked about the amazing revival of ballet in London—a revival which, La Meri says, has made London the centre of the world of ballet. "Italy is the home of ballet in the historical sense, but London, since the Russian ballet died with the eclipse of St. Petersburg, has become the centre of the traditional ballet



It is the new type of ballet, such as that presented by Elsa Kahl and Rudolph Pescht, of the Ballets Jooss (above), to which many dyed-in-the-wool London balletomanes object.

"But England is very conservative. The Londoner loves 'Les Sylphides' and 'L'Oiseau de Feu,' and the other ballets that sprang to fame in the hey-day of Diaghileff, but the newer forms of ballet are a positive anathema to him. The Vic-Wells ballet company put on a fine ballet called 'Job'—it completely broke with the old traditions—but London showed its disapproval in no uncertain way.

"The part of Satan in 'Job' was played by a young Australian, Robert Helpmann—he's been to New Zealand, hasn't he? In my opinion he was the best dancer in the company.

In this interview with the "Radio Record," La Meri (left), the famous dancer now in New Zealand, speaks of the opposition to the presentation of new ballets in London. (A Spencer Digby study).

"New York is far more open-minded. A German woman who demonstrated the new and vigorous style of German dancing in London was definitely cold-shouldered. In New York the same dancer was received with enthusiasm. Incidentally, this vigorous type of dancing shows

the beginnings of a new school. Ballet languished when it reached the stage where the men were scarcely discernible from the women—the public didn't want a display of effeminacy. But with the introduction of new vigour it has revived wonderfully. Ballet dancing means long hours of perspiration without much mental effort. Look at the finest male ballet dancer in the world, Nijinsky. He could dance for hours—a rhythmic poem of delight—and yet, when he was called upon to create dances and arrange his own choreography he was a miserable failure.

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