

Show's sets, costumes challenge imagination

By ETHEL SIMMONS

The Birmingham Village Players has always gone all out creating costumes and sets for its productions. But "The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild" has got to be the most challenging.

The show runs Friday and Saturday and also May 19-20 at the playhouse at Chestnut and Hunter.

A comedy in three acts by Paul Zindel, "Mildred Wild" stars Helen Parrish as a female Walter Mitty. She lives in incredibly cluttered quarters behind a candy store, during the 1950s. Her brass bed, covered with a purple satin spread and heart-shaped pillow, is her throne for dreaming about being the famous movie stars she reads about in fan magazines.

The special effects include blinker lights that flash and music that lets the audience know a dream sequence is about to occur. And Mildred's dreams are the wildest.

HIGHLIGHT OF the show has got to be a sequence where Mildred becomes a sarong-clad Dorothy Lamour, who gets grabbed by King Kong. Before all this happens, there's a volcano eruption, and all the boxes piled high on shelves along one wall of Mildred's bedroom come tumbling down.

Dave Zeese, longtime Village Players set designer, has come up with the fantasy setting that is Mildred's bedroom, plus the props and fantasies she finds herself dreaming.

Theater

Zeese made the King Kong creature, a gorilla who required 40 yards of stinky black, hand-cut fabric strips. King Kong is 12 feet high, and that's with only the upper half of his torso visible.

During the Dorothy Lamour dream sequence, King Kong rises from behind the bed and his arms encircle the heroine by coming around the sides of the stage.

"It takes three people to manipulate the gorilla," Zeese said, "one raising him on a pulley system and one on each arm."

AS IF THIS weren't enough, just before meeting Kong, Ms. Parrish as Mildred has to make a quick change that gets her out of her ratty bathrobe and from under a hair dryer.

Under the bathrobe is the Dorothy Lamour sarong, and Ms. Parrish wears a long brunette wig that must fall down when a Sabe-like native boy pulls her away from the dryer and off with the robe.

Said Don Nagel, who designed all costumes, "With all the activity, we don't know if the sarong will be there."

In another sequence, Mildred becomes Vivian Leigh as Scarlett

O'Hara. For this, Ms. Parrish wears the most expensive costume ever done for a Village Players production.

"The Scarlett O'Hara dress is all embroidered organza ruffles from the waist to the floor. It cost \$85, which is a lot when you consider most costumes we make cost \$5 or \$6," Nagel said.

The skirt of Scarlett O'Hara's dress has a hoop that is so large a big pulley drops it on her, backstage.

THERE ARE MANY complete costume changes during the show, and even the longest of these takes only 30 seconds. Each change requires wig, costume and shoes for Mildred. Three dressers work with her, one for each function.

In one sequence, the costume change is so fast Ms. Parrish requires a double, to run across the stage. Making fast changes often is facilitated by having the performers wear more than one costume at a time.

"I have a gold lame Jean Harlow dress under a housedress and a robe, for a quick change," Ms. Parrish said.

Margaret Remondino, who makes the costumes for Village Players shows, made all the costumes especially for "Mildred Wild" except for a romper suit Jo Ewald wears in a "Good Ship Lollipop" sequence, which came from Ms. Remondino's own costume collection, and Mildred's beat-up old bathrobe, actually an old one of Margaret's.

Nagel said, "We couldn't find a

bathrobe in bad enough shape, and finally Margaret came up with this old one she had just thrown out. We're going to dye it purple because purple is Mildred's color."

As Ginger Rogers, Mildred appears in a white chiffon dress with feather boa. Ms. Parrish rehearsed the dance number for this sequence, using a piece of draped fabric to simulate the skirt.

ALTHOUGH MS. Parrish has not done a lot of shows before and very little singing or dancing, she had no trouble with her lines and was not worried about the musical numbers, except for the Ginger Rogers one.

"I'm not supposed to be good," she explained, between swaying in that special Ginger Rogers fashion. "I'm schlammy David from Greenwich Village."

But Ms. Parrish is practicing those steps. "I like to do things well, and make them look bad."

All that said, who plays Mildred's husband, the male lead, is Fred Astaire during the Ginger Rogers sequence. He must go from a pair of pajamas to a cutaway in 45 seconds.

"The shirt, vest, tie and wing collars are all sewn together," Nagel said. "It's open down the back, and zips up."

ACTOR BORIS Sellers has a lot of parts and costume changes during the show, three of these as girls. In one

number he wears three-inch high-heeled gold pumps.

"His wife walked out during rehearsal. She couldn't take it," Nagel said. Sellers works for the Detroit Institute of Arts, and 21 secretaries from the museum are coming to see him in the show.

Helen Parrish works as coordinator of services at the Community House in Birmingham. The Senior Men's Club is always invited to dress rehearsal, and 70 men and their wives were looking forward to watching Ms. Parrish at that rehearsal Tuesday night.

Set designer Dave Zeese went to great lengths to provide the old nos-

taglia in Mildred's environment. The mirror of her vanity table is adorned with old magazine photos of the stars she dreams about, and many of these pictures are from the collectors of area film buffs.

"We have a few pictures that are so special, we're only going to put them out each night before the show, and take them down afterward. We don't dare let anything happen to those pictures," Zeese said.

THE SET includes peeling, flowered wallpaper, which in reality is designs stenciled on brown paper bags. Shelves are piled high with old boxes and magazines.

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