

Sister Marita Loves People

Theatre Offers Rich Experience

All the world's a stage to Sister Marita, S.L., chairman of the drama department of Webster College, and the people on it contribute to a fascinating, rich and rewarding life for her.

Sister Marita loves people and she believes that there is no better place to know them and to appreciate them than in the theatre.

"Theatre is people," she says. "The discovery of people is fascinating and stimulating. I never exhaust the mystery of people and I love the theatre because it is about people and their struggles to become what they are destined to be."

Ever since she was a little girl in Webster Groves, Sister has been interested in dramatics. With a neighborhood group in the vicinity of 308 East Lockwood avenue where she lived, she wrote plays, produced them and acted in them. Most of the plays were based upon those the children had seen at the movies but Sister Marita and her little friends gave them a new emphasis to the delight of the entire neighborhood.

Vivacious and enthusiastic about everything she does, this talented member of the college's outstanding faculty moves gracefully and swiftly from assignment to assignment. She leads a busy life but she loves every minute of it. Fifteen hours a day aren't sufficient, in her estimation, to do all of the many things she wants to do — and fifteen hours is the "average working day" for her during her busiest seasons.

At present she is extremely busy completing plans for the third season of Theatre Impact, the college's summer stock company which has assumed professional status and offers a unique form of entertainment to the greater St. Louis area. Sister was an originator of the Theatre Impact idea and her efforts have contributed largely to its success.

The transfer of the location of the summer productions from the original location on the fine arts campus to the Kirkwood amphitheatre means much additional work but it is the type of challenge which this dedicated and industrious young woman finds to her liking. Looking forward to producing plays in the new \$1,500,000 theatre, construction of which made necessary the move to Kirkwood for the current season, is sufficient satisfaction and anticipation to make up for any hardship involved.

During the regular college year — as well as during the summer session — Sister has a full teaching schedule which includes classes in various phases of dramatics. She also serves as alternate director of the student plays just as she does with the Theatre Impact plays. Her administrative duties as the chairman of one of the college's most popular and well known departments require both time and talent, too. She also is in demand for television appearance as well as talks before theatre and club groups. Her poise and her fluency before



Sister Marita, S.L.
Chairman of the Drama Department.

an audience, contribute to the appreciation of these appearances which her admirers declare are much too seldom.

Sister Marita says that she never dreamed that she would be so fortunate as to combine her two interests — her devotion to Christ and the theatre. When she decided to become a nun she made up her mind that she would forget her love of the theatre because she felt that the two probably could not be coordinated. Becoming a member of the congregation of the Sisters of Loretto meant more to her. However, it was not long before the two interests were brought together and they have been happily allied for her ever since.

Sister Marita was reared in Webster Groves, the daughter of the late Albert Michenfelder and Ruth Michenfelder. Her mother continues to reside in Webster Groves at 221 Hawthorne avenue as does her brother, Albert A. Michenfelder, an attorney. Another brother, the Reverend Joseph Michenfelder, M.M. is working in Lima Peru with Catholic Communication's and a third brother, Dr. Jack Michenfelder, is on the Staff of Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. A sister is Mrs. Gerald Phelan, 3952A Castleman avenue.

Sister received her elementary education at Holy Redeemer School in Webster Groves, then attended Webster Groves High School, from which she was graduated. Her early interest in the theatre was intensified in high school through the guidance and inspiration of her dramatics instructor, Patricia MacIlrath, who now is chairman of the theatre department of Kansas City University. She encouraged a group to present a series of four plays a year. Sister was active in this group and the Webster Groves Theatre Guild.

Pursuing her interest in dramatics further, Sister entered Webster College and majored

in dramatics. Her four years there were exciting years in which she appeared in many plays including the Shakespearean productions that were extremely popular then, and also learned everything she could about every facet of the theatre. It was upon graduation from Webster that she decided to become a Sister of Loretto, even though it meant giving up her theatrical interests.

At the Loretto Novitiate in Nerinx, Kentucky, it became apparent that there was need for talented sisters to provide entertainment and that Sister Marita was the logical one for such assignments. Her first play was at the Christmas season, and it marked the beginning of a realization that the two interests could be combined.

During the summer, after finishing Webster, Sister Marita had started working toward her Master's Degree at St. Louis University. This she obtained after completing her novitiate, and teaching for several years in St. Louis, Kansas City, and New Mexico. She then came to Webster six years ago as chairman of the department. Some further graduate study was pursued during a summer at the University of Michigan. Sister also had the unique experience during the second semester of the 1962-63 college year of attending the famous drama school of Yale University, being one of the few women and the only nun enrolled there at the time.

Highlights of her many interesting experiences, according to Sister Marita, was a trip she took a year ago to visit famous theatres in this country and Canada. The trip was made with leading theatrical designers of the country on a special foundation grant to study the theatres and assist in the planning of the \$1,500,000 Webster College one now under construction.

Now she is looking forward, first of all, to a thrilling summer with many hours of work to assure the success of the third season of Theatre Impact. She dreams as she works, her dream being that a resident stock company, such as Theatre Impact represents, may become a year-round project of the college. She sees this as a possibility when the new performing arts center is completed. She also is anticipating a much larger drama department with increased faculty and student body. All of which means more people for her to love and appreciate.

"Theatre Impact has given me the opportunity to work closely with a group of people sometimes so exhausted that I wonder how they could continue to be so considerate of each other. Sister Marita says. "It has given me the opportunity to observe how wonderful they can be in spirit of hard work and fatigue. A summer season such as this with a new play every week taxes not only the talents but the endurance of everyone involved. It has been a tremendous experience to find no quickness of temper. This involvement brings out the best in people."