

# Couple courts queen of arts

By Lucy Lien

Cindy and Bill Wallis met in May, 1968, while performing at Southern Illinois University. Six months later they were married.

At present the Wallis' are involved in University of Nebraska-Lincoln theatrical productions. This summer Cindy is in two of the Summer Repertory productions at Howell Theatre, and is the assistant director for "Birthday Party." Bill is in three of the productions and may be in the fourth.

In repertory theatre, with the exception of the first week, the same play is never performed two nights in a row. In Howell this summer, the actors will be in four plays throughout the summer: "Little Mary Sunshine," "Birthday Party," "School for Wives," and "Cohan is a Grand Old Name."

Bill noted that repertory theatre is "a new challenge to the actors, to become four different people. Generally they cast us so we don't have too many big parts to learn."

This summer Cindy will be playing Nancy in "Little Mary Sunshine," and Nellie Cohan, George M.'s mother, in "Cohan is a Grand Old Name." Bill will be playing as a forest ranger in "Little Mary," as Goldberg, a hit man, in "Birthday Party," and as Jerry, George M.'s father, in "Cohan."

The worst thing about repertory theatre, Bill said, "is it takes so long to memorize your lines. You have to economize your time and try to memorize your lines during rehearsals."

"Summer Rep is a very intense learning experience for both of us," Cindy added.

Being involved in so many productions, however, takes a great deal of time for rehearsals as well as for learning lines. Bill noted that June 20 was "the worst day I've ever had. I rehearsed from 9:00-12:00, 12:00-2:00, 2:00-5:00, and from 7:00-10:30."

Both the Wallis' have professional aspirations, and both are interested in a variety of related fields. Cindy's main interest is as a stage actress, but she has also done work as a costumer and has had a great deal of training in dance.

Next to acting, Bill's major interests include writing and directing. He has also had a great deal of work in music, and said he plans to begin studying electronic music.

Bill has formerly worked on the script of "Napoleon," an opera that was performed at Kimball Recital Hall last year.

At this time he and Richard Moore of the music department have been commissioned to write a musical dance drama on the American Indian. Bill noted that for this play, sponsored by the Bicentennial Commission, the Nebraska Arts Council and Nebraskans for Public Television, he will be writing the script and doing the stage direction.

This drama, he said, is based on a mythic story about the initiation rites of the American Plains Indians. The drama will trace the spiritual development of one man.

The production of this "environmental dance drama", Bill explained, will make use of synthetic sounds, have a fluid orchestra which moves around the stage as the orchestra is playing and will be a multimedia production with slides and film as well as live actors.

"I am very, very excited about it," he said.

Although he had hoped the

opera "Napoleon" would get to the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, he said he believes that since his new drama is sponsored nationally, "it has better than an O.K. chance of getting in."

He noted that the biggest bulk of funds requested for the drama was from the National Endowment of the Arts. They have not yet heard, however, whether this request was approved.

"Napoleon", he said, took two and a half years to write, and he expects it will take a similar amount of time to write the American Indian drama. The Bicentennial Commission is sponsoring the play to be completed in 1976.

cause both are at the right age for most parts. Cindy and Bill are both 28.

"In a few years it will be too late," Bill said.

The need to separate to grab whatever acting jobs can be found is caused by the large number of actors seeking work in the theatre. Acting jobs are extremely difficult to find.

Bill estimated that 60 per cent of all actors are unemployed, but Cindy said she believed the figure was much higher, with at least 80 per cent being unemployed.

Another hazard of the small job market is that what jobs are found pay little. Bill noted that only about the top 10 per cent of the actors in this country

that people don't realize that theatre here is so good. This is a very talented area here, the staff is excellent, and the new kids coming in are just great."

Cindy noted that although "we like living here, I don't want to stay in Lincoln, because the response to the theatre here is so poor."

"The arts probably can't make it here," Bill said. "Movie theatres are the big competition with the theatre. But people don't realize that live theatre is a totally different aesthetic experience. When watching live theatre you're changed. It's a very vibrant form of experience."

They said that NU theatre was so good, because in spite of

community indifference, the staff is very dedicated. They mentioned that David Bell and Dr. Morgan are extremely talented directors, and "Jerry Lewis and Nancy Meyer are just the best" as far as technical work is concerned.

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Before choosing the theatre as a career, both Cindy and Bill had backgrounds in other (Continued on Page 8)



Cindy and Bill Wallis go over the finer points of drama during a rare period free of rehearsals.

Before "Napoleon", Bill had written a couple dramatic sketches as well as a great deal of poetry. He had had one volume of poetry published as well as about 25 additional poems in various publications.

Because of his commitment to the Bicentennial drama, Bill said he will be in the Lincoln area at least until that is completed. Next year he will probably be teaching high school in Omaha as well as working on the play.

Cindy, however, said she may leave the area for a time to act somewhere else. "We want to go where we can work," she said.

One way of finding work, she explained, is through professional auditions which qualify the actor for professional plays throughout the country. "These professional auditions are very hard," she said.

Both Bill and Cindy qualified for these auditions last year, but were unable to attend them because they were acting in "Dark of the Moon" at Howell, and couldn't afford the time to travel to Minneapolis for the auditions.

When the couple separates to work on jobs in different parts of the country they noted it was difficult. "Separating is not a strain on our marriage," Bill said, "but is very hard on us individually."

They have separated to work before. Last year Cindy was in Minneapolis for a semester working in a play.

Both agreed, however, that it was necessary to grab acting parts whenever possible, be-

earn enough money to live comfortably on.

Consequently, he said, most actors must hold down other jobs in addition to working at what acting jobs they find.

Bill, for example, was employed as a Centennial Education Program fellow for the last two years. He is still working with university students on independent projects.

Cindy worked as a graduate assistant at NU, teaching dancing movement. She has also had to hold down jobs unrelated to acting, such as working at Penney's Department Store.

They said they hope eventually to move somewhere where they can both find work, perhaps to London, or perhaps to work with director David Bell after he leaves Nebraska.

Everywhere they've been, they said, there has been a great deal of young acting and writing talent. "What interferes with the development of talent in Lincoln," Bill said, "is the generally conservative attitude. Lincoln doesn't support its artists."

In spite of the lack of interest on the part of Lincoln citizens, however, Bill said the dramatic productions at Howell "are better than I've seen at a university. The productions are just as good as any plays I've ever seen, and better than most, with the exception of a few very professional plays."

"The NU department of acting is excellent," Cindy added. "Someone like Dr. Morgan just amazes me, he's so great."

Bill said, "It just amazes me



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