

Mrs. Matthews Is Guided by Instinct in Designing Her Theatrical Costumes

Execution Proves Historically Accurate Without Reference to Textbooks Which Most Artists Require.

This is the fourth of a series, telling the stories of Indianapolis women who have achieved fame by their own initiative and ambition.

BY BEATRICE BURGAN
Times Woman's Page Editor

That an artist's instinctive execution may be historically accurate is proved in the costume designing of Mrs. Paul Matthews, who, like her husband, has a hobby outside her homemaking duties. When Mrs. Matthews rushes home with an armful of packages, eyes starry and cheeks flushed, Mr. Matthews, musician and financial secretary of the American Legion, knows she has an idea. "I just can't wait until tomorrow," he says for her, and becomes quite as excited as she.

Because Mrs. Matthews has found that her interpretations of costume design for the Civic theater generally have coincided with ideas of executions of years ago, she follows her instinctive feel. That is the theory on which she works.

It spoils the fun for her if she has to follow definitely the mode of accepted costumes. In planning wardrobes for the theater, she first reads the play, to detect the character and mood of the cast.

After she gets an impression of the character, she confers with the director, to compare their interpretations.

With her findings and an idea of the stage setting in mind, she begins actual execution of the costumes.

"I become confused when I read what I should do," explained Mrs. Matthews. "I like to work out my own ideas and then refer to books to check my judgment."

She often investigates the types of costumes used in previous presentations of a particular play, but she never copies anything as she definitely sees it.

"It's not costing when one has to follow exactly another's conception," she maintains.

This instinctive flair was shown in her first attempts at serious designing, which came about because of the confidence and persistence of an artist friend, Sheila Burlingham of St. Louis.

Starts on Career

Miss Burlingham, now a fresco artist and sculptress, had executed some batiks and wanted Mrs. Matthews to design from them tea gowns for a society woman.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly," gasped the young designer. "I've never attempted anything so big." Miss Burlingham understood her youthful reluctance, but she was determined.

She invited Mrs. Matthews to tea one day. Another guest was there. The woman, Mrs. Matthews soon was to learn, was the one who wanted the gowns.

"It was something I couldn't escape. I couldn't be rude and refuse, so I made several for her and her daughter," Mrs. Matthews recalled.

She blended the colors of the batiks with the lines suitable for the personality of the wearer.

Admired by Artist

The gowns later were exhibited in Kansas City. An artist admiring them one day asked her if she knew what period they represented. "Well, no," she confessed confusedly. "I just followed the feel of how the material should be designed."

"They're Renaissance," she answered. "That was proof enough of the accuracy of her instinct, for the patterns of Miss Burlingham's batiks were Renaissance.

For two years Mrs. Matthews has been in charge of costumes for the Children's theater and the Actors and Workers' Guild of the Civic theater.

"It's been forever that I've been designing for my family and friends," she explained. "At 7 I was dressing dolls for party prizes and at 11 I made my first dress."

She recalls worrying her family to submission in the matter of designing their dresses. At 17 she bought \$60 worth of material to make herself an ensemble.

Success With Costume

Her mother was aghast at her confidence, but rather than shatter it, she merely smiled hopefully.

"The dress turned out successfully, but Mother later confessed that the experience added at least a dozen gray hairs to her head," Mrs. Matthews reminisced.

Mr. Matthews admires his wife's gift of line and color executions in costumes, and she is proud of his tone and rhythm interpretations on piano and organ. While he plays the organ at Tabernacle Presbyterian church as a hobby, she is making articulate her talent.

"I encourage his musical expression and he sympathizes with my artistic inclination," pointed out Mrs. Matthews. "We have fun debating what talent 5-year-old Paul Jr. will inherit."

Enjoys Her Work

"I like best the planning, buying, cutting and fitting," explained Mrs. Matthews, who is young, vivid and enthusiastic. "I'd be pleased never to see a needle and thread. I use them only to get results. When the dress is pinned up, all the thrill of creation is gone."

"People misrepresent themselves so," she lamented. "They wear dresses that betray their real personalities."

"Whether you approve yourself or not, it's Mrs. Matthews' idea that you express your own individuality. So many people imitate some one else—inside and outside. All you have is an unconvincing copy," she pointed out.

The coloring and temperament of a person usually harmonize, she has found. If the temperament is incongruous to the coloring, it's probably because the natural tendency has been aborted by affection of another's personality or frustrated by environment, according to Mrs. Matthews.

Disturbed by Discords

It is usual, Mrs. Matthews has found, that a person with black hair and contrasting bright eyes is more abrupt, more metallic in character and chooses combinations of primary colors that don't blend.

If a person dresses contrary to her real self, Mrs. Matthews immediately is conscious of it. It disturbs her quite as much as a discordant note upsets a musician.

"I think the wrong effect registers on most people without the same sense that I have," Mrs. Matthews explained. "They experience an unexplainable repulsion, for which they don't attempt to account. It's really due to an artistic reaction to an inappropriate costume."

She has difficulty often when she designs clothes for other people, for she frequently can't agree on the complete idea.

"Many times their original ideas are good, and then they add something that detracts from the becoming effect," she said.

"I try to interpret the personality of my subject and forget myself. I attempt to draw out their individual

Paul Likes 'Pretties,' Too



Mrs. Paul Matthews and Paul Jr.

Mrs. Paul Matthews, glancing through a fashion magazine, is interrupted by her son, Paul Jr., who admires "pretty colors and dresses" like his mother. While Mrs. Matthews follows the general trend of fashions, her design of dresses and costumes comes from her own instinctive "feel" of what is artistic and appropriate.

Manners and Morals

BY JANE JORDAN

Brides, or brides-to-be, have a lot of questions which they would like to have answered. They can depend upon Jane Jordan for an honest reply. Write them letter now!

Dear Jane Jordan—We are a boy of 21 and a girl of 19. We are debating whether to get married Jan. 1 or to wait for a year. We have nothing to start on but the boy's job, which he knows to be dependable. I think we ought to wait until we have some money saved for a foundation. Then we should be able to meet reverse circumstances, which are bound to arise. The boy believes that his job is sufficient for the present, and that we should begin to gether.

YOUNG COUPLE OF TODAY Answer—You are a very wise young lady, unusually far-sighted for your age. It is true that financial conditions under which a marriage is contracted are of vital importance to its future. When a married pair has been accustomed to better circumstances than they can afford by themselves, they are apt to chafe under the necessity for constant economy. I rarely have seen love and bliss survive poverty.

Answer—He is more likely to be timid than shocked or stubborn. It might pay you to tone down your conduct to a point where he would feel at ease. Other boys probably know more about his reactions than I do. Therefore, I am asking them to answer your letter for me. How does Rosalind's behavior strike you, young men readers?

RODALIND Dear Jane Jordan—I am a woman of 30, with one child. My husband turned to another woman who is not what we call good. My mistake was in letting my housework come first. I wasn't a real pal to him. He is the kind you have to make over and show how you care, or he won't make a move. He's your slave if you baby him.

I understand him well now, but I don't know how to go about getting around him. I don't want to make myself look cheap and vulgar. He's very easy to handle if once I get to him, but I don't know how to start, and there's where you come in.

JUST A FOOL Answer—Help him a letter and tell him how much you miss him and need him. Ask him to come and make it clear that he isn't going to be scolded. Frankness and a persuasive attitude will turn the trick. I think it always is wise for the offended to make the first overtures toward the offender.

The offender is not secretly aware of his own guilt and therefore is less tense. Your attitude is perfect, and I predict victory for it without knowing the son.

WHICHVER IT IS, I SHOULD SAY IT MOST DECIDEDLY IS NONE OF THE SON'S BUSINESS WHAT HIS FATHER DOES.

E. M. J.

Answer—The chances are that the son always has been more or less jealous of his father. When the son was a little boy he may have looked upon the father as a rival for the affections of the mother. This, of course, is a Freudian viewpoint and I have no way of vouching for it without knowing the son.

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