

No Rest for 'High Cost' Team

By EVELINE OEN
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ECCENTRIC PHOTO

COLLABORATORS ISABEL HIMELHOCH and Dean Coffin seem to be discussing a point in the "High Cost of Loving" score. It looks from here as if the talented Coffin is winning his point. He and Mrs. Himelhoch (words and music respectively) begin working on the next spring's show about the same time the rest of us are watching the Detroit Lions-Green Bay Packer Thanksgiving Day battle.

-Dean Coffin has hardly finished his Thanksgiving turkey before he is at work on a new play for the Birmingham Arts Festival.

He and Isabel Himelhoch (words and music, respectively) must begin early to have the musical ready for reading, casting and the first rehearsal.

THE TIMETABLE runs something like this:

- November, December, January: Coffin gets an idea for and makes a rough outline of the play.

- February, March: A series of conferences and "hash sessions" are held in which Coffin and Mrs. Himelhoch work out such details as where songs should go, what the over-all tone should be as well as that of specific songs. Then Coffin perfects the script and writes a rough draft or "book"—"That may have its ending changed three or four times," said Mrs. Himelhoch—which he gives to Mrs. Himelhoch.

- March, April: Coffin starts writing lyrics (he can't read music so the "words" must come first), which he tapes — along with his idea of beat, tempo and general melody (Mrs. Himelhoch doesn't think he's a very good singer). She then writes the music — which may or may not be what Coffin had in mind, and that leads to another "hash session."

- April, May: Once they finally agree, the song is sent to an arranger (Harry Safford), who returns the work as quickly as possible, and rehearsals begin. There are 17 songs in this year's show.

- From there on (May, June), the show is in the hands of the production crew and cast with "the authors" on hand only for occasional polishing and rewriting where necessary once Mrs. Himelhoch has taught the cast their songs.

BOTH FIND the play fun and chal-

lenging though each works on it in an entirely different way.

Coffin applies his talents on weekends and while "on the road" for Jim Handy, where he is vice president in charge of stage presentations ("the use of theatrical devices for communication of information").

"I've passed up many a gamey evening in New York to work on the show," he said. "It's the one major writing chore that I do for fun."

MRS. HIMELHOCH, on the other hand, has a more concentrated schedule, working 10 and 12 hours a day on the music once she begins.

"Sometimes I dash off a song in 10 minutes; sometimes I work for four or five hours and get only two measures," she said.

"I find that when I get into the mood of writing, it's lot easier to get the songs written and out of the way."

Mrs. Himelhoch majored in music while attending Wheaton College, Norton, Mass., and wrote the score for the annual college musicals during all four years that she was there. Later she taught music and did some professional songwriting.

FOR COFFIN, the evolution of the show begins with an emotion.

"If there's to be anything of value in a piece, the author has to put his values and his emotions into it. This is what makes the difference between 'art' and someone just demonstrating his skills," he said.

From the emotion he finds a way to tell the story best.

"In this case, I'm laughing at myself and a few thousand other suburbanites who are tangled up with credit living," he noted rather seriously.

"THEN I HAVE to have characters about whom I would enjoy writing. After the characters comes what they do, what happens," he said.

(See TEAM, Page 17)

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