

Estelle Condra Finds Her Niche

Lots of Projects Keep Her Busy

By CLARA HIERONYMUS

Estelle Condra, Nashville's remarkable (and welcome) gift from South Africa, has had no problem in finding her niche here.

Nor in the rest of the country either, for that matter.

Many will remember her as Annie, the teacher in the Nashville Academy Theater's staging of *Miracle Worker* who opened the doors of communication to the deaf and blind Helen Keller. Others will know her as the dramatic storyteller bringing tribal folktales to life in absorbing fashion.

Trained as an actor in London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Condra has used her talents this year in programs taking her from Washington to New Orleans, with many programs here at home. Early last summer she taught at the Kennedy Center under the auspices of the Lyndhurst Foundation for gifted high school students and appeared in a story theater production for young children; later, she was at Wolf Trap, performing and demonstrating the art of storytelling or other actors in a Head Start program and, this month, participated in Head Start Program at Tennessee State University.

Condra was involved in a storytelling marathon a week ago to help make people aware of Fisk University and on Friday she'll tell her stories at the Tennessee Theater Association meeting at MTSU. Last Saturday she inducted an all-day workshop for parents and teachers under the auspices of Davis-Kidd Booksellers, using song and story as a way to stimulate creativity with movement and words.

Another area for her skills is the Arts in Education project in New Orleans, where she will take part in "Literature Alive" for high school students this winter. She will use sonnets, ballads and other poetry forms in five daily workshops and performances, and direct choral speaking groups, from Nov. 22 to Dec. 12. Incidentally, the Arts in Education director is Shirley Corey, wife of Orlin Corey whose *Book of Job* is well known here. Condra reports that Orlin

is presently on a theater visit to Russia.

She will barely have time to catch her breath before Ron Huff's Christmas Eve food fund-raiser symphony concert at TPAC, for which she will direct a choral-speaking group.

Nashville Chamber Theater is readying the Robert Anderson play, *Silent Night, Lonely Night* for the opening of its 1984-85 season. With Les Harrison as director, the two-act drama opens Thursday and will play Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. through Nov. 3.

The play was first performed in 1959 in Broadway's Morosco Theater with Henry Fonda and Barbara Bel Geddes in the leading roles. It's a warmly touching story of two lonely strangers who meet on Christmas Eve in a small New England town.

Harrison says it will be done as a period piece in its 1959 setting, "but the realities of life as expressed through Anderson's poignant work are timeless."

Rita Roxas and Robert O'Connell will be seen in the principal roles. Roxas has performed at Poverty Playhouse (*Crimes of the Heart* and *Cloud Nine*), Gonzo Theater, and Nashville Academy Theater (Hansel and Gretel). A graduate of Lake Erie College, she has had mime training with Bert Houle in San Francisco and drama studies at the Pittsburgh Playhouse.

O'Connell is a Vanderbilt graduate in political science, with a law degree from UT. At Vanderbilt he appeared in *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Three-Penny Opera*, *Look Homeward Angel*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Juno and the Paycock*.

His work at Circle includes *Taming of the Shrew*, *Antigone* (for which he won 1974 Best Supporting Actor honors), and *Chapter Two*. O'Connell has also acted at Poverty Playhouse, the Barn Dinner Theater, and theaters in Maryland.

Others in the cast are Lisa Lane, Jeff Elder, Jean Pickruhl, and Gregory Kircher. Fran Ross is the producer, with Nancy Clymer as stage manager. Ben Nance is the set designer and Peggie Dobson, costumer.

Art and Theater



—Staff photo by Robert John

Estelle Condra, animated teller of South African folk tales, wears the traditional storyteller's ring around her neck. Now a Nashville resident, Condra is in demand nationally as a storyteller and workshop leader.