

Wave a Red Flag, and She

By ROSE KAHN

Wave a red flag, and she'll grab her white gloves and run.

The snow-white gloves are her trademark, her New Orleans heritage.

"Response to a red flag is a salvation complex that runs in our family," Muriel Bultman Francis explains. "My Dad (A. Fred Bultman) saved the opera when it was about to fold.

"What a crisis!" she recalled, a glint in her eyes.

"So when the Repertory was about to fold for lack of a home, that was my red flag signal.

"But don't give me credit. I have friends. The Repertory has friends. Our friends have friends.

"It was like a five-fire alarm. Phones rang with the urgency of sirens. Everyone wanted to come to the rescue.

"One of my friends, a prominent citizen, called me and said 'For Heaven's sake how do I get in touch with this Bogner dame fighting for the Repertory? I want to

help.'

"You're speaking to her, me Muriel.' I reminded him. I'm Mrs. Howard Bogner socially, but I use Muriel Bultman Francis professionally because more people know me by that name.

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"WE GET HUMOROUS calls, serious calls, sentimental calls. But every caller is sincere.

"We even have an offer of a church for a rehearsal hall. Tony Devine and Geddes Journet bought a church on Esplanade Ave., which they had planned to use as a theatre, but the project fell through.

"I think we'll be able to take them up on that offer because while the Scheuering Room is being readied, we'll need a place for rehearsals.

"Three prominent busi-

nessmen actually asked to be on our board. They were unanimously elected.

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"NEW ORLEANIANS certainly debunk the desert-a-sinking-ship theory.

"When everything was going smoothly, many were apathetic. But when they realized we needed friends, they proved themselves.

"You know, New Orleans is an emergency city. It understands a good dramatic situation. It loves drama. And we certainly had it the past weeks.

"I suppose it's our inherent love for the dramatic that has always made us love the theatre."

While the Repertory will offer good, classic and contemporary theatre to attract adults, it will not lose sight of its obligations to the youth of the city, Mrs. Francis explained.

"We even plan to take

WENTY-FIVE

Charges

segments of plays to the schools, because we feel that the youngsters want theatre. They've shown that already.

"And today where can they find good, non smutty theatre? Not on Broadway and not in the movies where sex, homosexuality and nudism are considered box office.

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"THE REPERTORY also offers workshop training for young people with acting, costume designing and stage designing talents. It might be said to bridge the gap between the splendid amateur theatres we have here and Broadway.

"It also offers an opportunity for citizens who have no theatrical ambitions but feel they should become involved in our city's cultural projects.

Some newcomers may be timid about offering their services. We promise them a warm welcome. We need them. It's time Orleanians recognized that every civic project seeds a broader base of operations.

This 90 pounds of perpetual motion known as Muriel Bultman Francis knows what it is to become involved.

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SHE IS PRESIDENT of the Delgado Art Museum, treasurer of the Spring Fiesta, on boards of the New Orleans Symphony, New Orleans Opera House Association, Cultural Attractions Fund, New Or-

leans Speech and Hearing Center, and Russell Holman Center and is on the art committee for the WYES auction.

And when Muriel Francis is on a committee, she works, every organization board will tell you.

How does she manage? "It's not impossible," she answers. "Not if you put in a seven day week, 16 hours a day. Except in an emergency when you may put in 20 hours"

If she had time, she could write a book. It might deal with names she help make.

She conducted her own public relations firm in New York and almost every important personality in the musical work was her client.

The roster included such names as Rise Stevens, Patrice Munsel, Yehudi Menuhin, Leonard Warren, Ezio Pinza, Birgit Nilsson, Lily Pons, Andre Kostelantcz, Dorothy Kirsten, Beverly Sills.

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"I WAS MOTHER confessor, den mother, big sister, little sister, to many of them," she recalls. "I loved them all.

"Artists need public relations people when they want to climb the ladder or when they're on top and want to stay there. In both positions they offer a challenge, my cup of tea."

She started her career selling subscriptions for the Chicago Opera Company.

"When it got cold, I con-

ducted my sales campaign by phone," she admits.

"In Chicago they charge for phone calls beyond a certain number. I ran up such a bill the phone company adored me. So did the Opera because I really sold.

"But the phone company recommended me to Grace Denton, one of the big theatrical promoters. She hired me as a phone solicitor. Bell Tel. and Tel. stock rose.

"I met the great Max Reinhardt. He was opening a workshop in California and hired me as talent scout. He paid well, but I should have paid him. He was an inspiring teacher, a beloved genius.

"He instilled in me a devotion to the creative arts. I guess I'm hooked."

A bell reminded her it was time for a committee meeting. She grabbed her white gloves and way she went.

FRIDAY



MURIEL BULTMAN FRANCIS States-Item Photo by Lee Delaune.
"Orleanians understand a good dramatic situation"