

by SARAH SNOW



Frances Cuka

THE theme of the Broadway hit *The Member of the Wedding* is what Americans call "togetherness"—the need people feel to belong, to be a part of something.

When the play started its Broadway run the first night audience stood up and cheered. The critics cheered too—in their own way. They called it a "striking new play," and a "stirring hit."

Carson McCullers' play, which she adapted from her own novel, went on to run for 500 performances. It made Julie Harris into a star, in the role of the gawky 12-year-old Frankie, the girl who wants to "belong." Julie played the same role in the film version.

Now it is presented as Play of the Week, with the part of Frankie going to Frances Cuka, and Vinnette Carroll has been brought from New York especially to fill the other starring role of the cook, Berenice.

This is Frances Cuka's first big TV role. She comes from Highgate, London, and owes her surname to a Czechoslovakian grandparent. She had her greatest success in the stage play *A Taste of Honey*, which kept her busy for a year until last December.

Now she has been engaged for Stratford next season. Her ambitions: To play Cleopatra—"only this couldn't be for about 15 years"—and Peter Pan. As Frankie she is taking 10 years off her age.

Dennis Waterman plays Frankie's friend, the seven-year-old John Henry. Jarvis, Frankie's brother—whose wedding she wants to be a part of—is played by Kevin Scott, and his fiancée by Ruda Michelle.

The play is set in a small Deep South town in 1945 two days before the wedding. Frankie feels she is "just an 'I' person." She explains: "All other people can say 'we.' When Berenice says 'we' she means her lodge and church and coloured people. Soldiers can say 'we' and mean the Army. All people belong to a 'we' except me."

Frankie's mother is dead and her father (James Dyrenforth) leaves her to her own devices. She has only two friends—Berenice and John Henry.

But they both "belong" in a way that excludes Frankie. John Henry has a devoted mother and Berenice four marriages behind her, has yet another suitor in T. T. Williams (André Dakar).

Twelve-year-old Dennis Waterman was chosen from dozens of boys for the part of John Henry. It is his first on television. He, too, will go to Stratford for the season.

Dennis attends a school where most of the pupils are aiming at a stage career, so there is no difficulty about rehearsals.

Dennis Waterman



Vinnette Carroll

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING

Play of the Week,
Tuesday 9.35

Lessons are from nine to one, and after this the boys and girls either go to work (and they are not allowed to accept too much) or to their drama classes.

Vinnette Carroll, whose rich, deep voice has an instantly arresting quality, is an altogether surprising personality. Once a qualified and practised clinical psychologist, she decided after six years that, as she told me, "I really wanted the theatre so much that I started going to evening classes for acting."

At 25, she won a two-year scholarship to New York's Dramatic Workshop.

After this, came several years' experience in the off-Broadway theatres. But it was her performances in a series of television plays, five years ago, that brought her success, and many starring roles as a result. She also teaches acting technique for three hours a day in a special school set up by New York's department of education.

Although unmarried, Vinnette described herself as very close to youngsters. Of the play, she told me: "I don't remember being in anything I've enjoyed doing more." After this production she is due to direct a play in New York—another of her theatre activities.