

Dorset Theatre Festival, Dorset, VT  
**Sidekicked** by Kim Powers. Directed by Jackson Gay.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

***“I’ve spent my life in Chenille , not Chanel.”***

A personal story, poignant yet funny, relating the life of a early television icon who never been forgotten highlights the Dorst season this summer. Kelly McAndrew does not imitate the voice or the on-screen style of Vivian Vance’s classic character, Ethel Mertz. Instead, she creates the real woman behind the person she played for a decade, gives us a true portrait of a working actress caught in the magic of television at a time when TV was not considered relevant and only big screen or stage work was considered legitimate.



Kelly McAndrew; Photp: Joey Moro

Ethel Mertz has survived for generations. Her on-screen relationships with her husband Fred, played by William Frawley, her neighbor, band leader Ricky Ricardo, played by Desi Arnaz, and especially Lucy Ricardo, played by Lucille Ball have screamed “comedy” for all these years. This play takes deeply backstage to the real interactions among them all and as truths emerge, so do audience reactions. All was not smooth and easy for Vance. She lived through the battles of this television life and simultaneously through her own troubled existence. These stories are the core of the drama in this play. Her style of telling her story to an invisible visitor to her room on this, the final night of the show, is what gives the performance a true authenticity.



Kelly McAndrew; Photo: Joey Moro

Vance's story is one of constant rejection, starting with her mother and her family and wending its way through her Broadway experiences, summer stock tours, and television, not to mention her marriages. The facts she relates about Frawley and Arnaz are not new and not really revelatory, but her interactions with Lucille Ball are fascinating considering their extraordinary on-screen friendship.

While not exactly a laugh-riot, this show keeps us amused and intrigued in equal proportions and McAndrew is a wonderful portrayer of the woman who became a star on "I Love Lucy" and never could put her character behind her, People expected Vance to be Ethel and she found

herself caught in that trap. Faced with a career decision on this final show night, she debates whether it is a reasonable choice to make or a fatal one. You will be as intrigued as she is confused.

Jackson Gay has done a fine job with his one-person cast (two actually but. . .), moving her deftly through her story and her decisions. McAndrew gives a better than credible performance, she becomes the woman Vivian Vance, a Vance we in the audience never knew.

Riw Rakkulchon has created a reasonable set for this backstage story. Fabian Fidel Aguilar has given the actress appropriate costumes and Seth Reiser has done a fine job lighting the show. Sinan Refik Zagar has provided perfect sound design work, efficiently seating this play in its time period.

I think people should venture out to beautiful Dorset, Vermont to see this play. It entertains, illuminates and educates all at the same time while providing reasons for laughter and a furtive tear or two. The title says it all, really. It's about a woman who was the star's sidekick and was herself attacked in that off-hand manner that sometimes happens when a supporting player puts the star out of the spotlight. Ball later confessed she hadn't realized how great an asset Vance was to her own work on the series, a tribute that came too late to give Vance any satisfaction.

+ 08/08/2-24 +

**Sidekicked** runs at the Dorset Theatre Festival, 104 Cheney Road, Dorset, VT through August 17. For tickets and information call 802) 867-2223 or go to [DorsetTheatreFestival.org](http://DorsetTheatreFestival.org)