Stage-Struck

They live on star dust and sunshine—33 stage-struck boys and girls band together in a co-operative summer theater at the seashore. The beach is their rehearsal hall.

When the dramatic students in Kevin Phister's class in New York do not want-act, they practice. Kevin Phister, the drama teacher, is a fighter for boyhood and not finding them, Phister said, "Why don't you enthusiasm your own dream?"

The students asked, "What would we cost for money?" and Phister told them, "This royal substitute is, I believe, a shadowing. Why do you not go out and earn yourselves!"

So the students did. Twenty-five of them do menial jobs around town to raise $600. They then boarded the hardscrabble Playhouse on the shore of Sag Harbor, Long Island.

A thing can July 1st in a tired and dusty condition, loaded with parts, luggage, dishes, pans, blankets and costumes, they piled onto Long Island Sound for the ride and off, emerged with hunger to heak the painting, moving and scrubbing the deck and setting up an opera business. The original group were all New York students, but most stage-struck boys and girls came from as far as Arizona, Kansas, Seattle, Washington, and Rio de Janeiro.

Bertie Ruth sits in beach chair with Phister reading the line "Your heart never knew a child's joy...."

Esquire Von Groen, dancer from Amsterdam, Holland, leads dance movement on the beach. The girls are: Left to right, Priscilla Drigh, Gosta Slave, Elizabeth Kahn, Blossom Plumb. Everybody goes barefoot.

Blossom Plumb (Shelmarie Fall, Conn.), and Marilyn Brando (Omaha, Neb.) acquire suntan while rehearsing.

Seaborn rehearsals are the daily diet of Playhouse players. Maria Lee, Phister sits in foreground.

Bigger success so far is Groene, with Priscilla Drighi in title role. Von Groen plays opposite Brazil, to join it. One student kidnapped from Boston. Now everything can smoothly, with the aid of drawing good crowds, and the students still doing all the work around the place. The weekly budget is only $87.50, and any profit at the end of the season is to be divided among all participants.

Phister, who was a famous Liberal in the pre-Hitler German State Theater, came to the country in 1929 to produce War and Peace and The Impressionists, and he seems to have been director of the Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research. His reputation in the country, or in his show, more critical than financial, poverty. He is still a student of life, who will not make a single sacrifice to expediency. Within a few weeks, he expects to become an American citizen.

Some famous lines, in addition, the sort of thing he would like to develop as a grand style. "It would be good for the theater," he says, "if summer-co-operative like ours were established throughout the country. In this way, all talented youngsters could have a chance at stage experience. Working co-operatively, he explains, the big overhead is eliminated. We operate as a school rather than as a producing company. We can afford more performances, more rehearsals, more experimentation."

Phister holds rehearsals on the beach. "When I think I will go out of my mind from the bad acting," he says, "I can jump in the water quick. This helps.

Phister's son, James, who is assistant director for Producer Man Ray Noble, teaches movement class on the beach—while Max Chouiers, Dyer, assistant director, and Professor von Groen, coach ballroom dancing in students in their lines.

The sea is a useful stage property, too. The plan for Twelfth Night is rehearsed on the shore. It is more or less the first scene in the play. On the beach, he says, "we can run from the water back down the sea coast."

"We are back," says Phister. "We lowered Von in red water. The audience can stand on the shore to see the scene and then move to rows for the end of the play."

Photographs for Collier's by Barker-Foss.