

Wandering actor refuses draft

by Bruce Mann
Feature Editor

Remember Avadon-Black, the traveling actor who brought his unique type of theatre experience to UNC for two performances in May 1970?

Well, it appears that Avadon-Black will not be returning for some time. Next Tuesday, the twenty-two year old actor goes on trial in Federal District Court of Los Angeles for refusing induction into the Army, thereby facing a sentence of up to five years in prison.

The information, scrawled on a slip of pink paper, came to the Tar Heel wrapped in a small Safeway Food Store paper bag, postmarked "Culver City" with the return address of only "Avadon-Black, Wandering Actor."

In the letter, he wrote: "I got to know a lot of people at UNC; many of them came to see my show. I was here during the strike. It was an amazing place to be."

The story of Avadon-Black began in April of 1969 when he left the UCLA School of Theatre. Traveling with only a pack, a sleeping bag, and a dream to bring special "personal theatre" to university students, Avadon-Black began presenting admission free one-man shows across the country, a practice which has led him on hitchhiking tours to over forty universities from Bangor to San Diego.

At each of the performances Avadon tries to involve his audience in the experience in order that they might gain insight into complexities of the human experience. Not as unstructured theatrically as some living theatre nor as traditional as a typical Broadway show, Avadon's presentations aim at helping people emerge from their standard spectator roles.

"It is necessary for people to get together outside of their roles to truly understand each other," he once said. "My way is through the theatre."

Avadon tries to accomplish this through the many facets of his show. One part of his program is devoted to the re-creation of the various characters—truckers, soldiers, and salesmen—who have carried him over 29,000 hitchhiked miles. All of these segments concentrate on how people of various backgrounds and different

experiences confront problems of their unusual situation.

For example, in a sequence he performed at UNC, Avadon plays a soldier from Fort Ord who tells of his personal army experiences: the cold inhumanity of military bureaucracy, a desperate need for money to support a family, and a frightening murder by military guards. Another piece has Avadon playing a confused and frustrated insurance salesman running away from his unreceptive wife who will neither accept his kisses nor sleep with him.

Interludes in the program feature the poetry of Stephen Crane and e.e. cummings, and a surrealist portion of each performance focuses on certain

characters drawn from the audience and sketched on stage.

Some say Avadon infuses his self-conjured theatre with a magic touch, and the statement rings frighteningly true since, in addition to his acting proficiency, Avadon is also an expert magician. Avadon uses his magic talents (including his trademark, the walnut shells and the hidden pea) not only to advertise his presence on campus but also in order to get to know people, what they are doing and thinking.

"Magic is like a common denominator in reaching people," he once said. "It's a way of talking to people and seeing how they react."

After two years of magic and theatre, though, Avadon is waiting for his trial. He

returned to Los Angeles February 2 to refuse induction into the armed services, and he feels strongly that his decision is correct.

"Life is sacred. I will do everything I can to perpetuate and inspire life. I will not learn to destroy. I cannot accept alternative service as that would affirm the government's right to impress men into service. I can't put an end to war or to the military corruption of the human spirit. I can only refuse to participate."

In 1970 the Daily Tar Heel published the hopeful statement "eventually he would like to organize a touring group for his 'personalized theatre' dream." Now it seems that because of the decision, Avadon-Black's vision must wait some few years for fulfillment.

WUNC-TV features 'Caesar'

"Pere Goriot," "Julius Caesar" and "The Advocates" highlight WUNC-TV's offerings this week on Channel 4.

Honore de Balzac's "Pere Goriot," from his massive compilation, "The Human Comedy," continues Sunday night at 9 p.m. (repeated Wednesday at 10 p.m.) on "Masterpiece Theatre," the highly touted Public Broadcasting System series. Alistair Cooke narrates.

"Pere Goriot's" target is the social-climbing aspirations of the bourgeoisie and in particular, those of old Goriot, a doting father who depletes his wealth and dignity to get his ungrateful daughters into high society.

This Friday night at 8:30 p.m., Shakespeare contributes to the "NET Playhouse Biography" series with a production of "Julius Caesar," starring

Robert Stephens, Maurice Denham, Frank Finlay, and Edward Woodward.

Of the four featured players, three are well known to NET Playhouse audiences. Stephens, who played in the film "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie," has starred in Playhouse's production of "Much Ado About Nothing" and in Chekhov's "The Seagull." Finlay also co-starred in "Much Ado About Nothing" as the comic Dogberry, and Denham played the father in John Hopkins' tragic four-part series, "Talking to a Stranger."

Senator Edmund Muskie (D., Maine) will urge withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Indochina by the end of this year in an appearance on "The Advocates," Tuesday at 9 p.m.

Muskie, leading contender for the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination, will join Advocate Howard

Miller in calling for Congressional action to force a December 1971 withdrawal deadline. William Rusher, publisher of the National Review, will lead the opposition.

Proponents believe setting an early termination date would spur serious peace negotiations in Paris, and that continuing U.S. presence in Southeast Asia would represent a U.S. attempt to "save face" at the cost of a higher death toll.

Opponents assert a precipitous withdrawal would strengthen the enemy's hand at the bargaining table while endangering Vietnamization efforts and possibly permitting a rapid Communist takeover. They consider the President well on the way to ending U.S. involvement at a less risky pace without Congressional interference.

Moderator for the program will be Victor Palmieri.

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