

# Black director Scott on yet another stage ...

by Bruce Mann  
Feature Editor

"I remember as a kid in Morristown, New Jersey, running home and saying that I had a part. And my mother saying what is it?" relates the black actor-director-teacher Harold Scott, currently in residence to direct the Carolina Playmakers' "And The Old Man Had Two Sons."

"I said little Black Sambo. And the room came to a dead halt."

It was not the last racial indignity Scott was to suffer — years later at Exeter, Scott discovered that the powers-that-be "couldn't, in their minds, see Shakespeare's Hotspur being played by a little colored boy," and so excluded him from their stage.

But it was the first sign of his nascent theatrical impulse, the first stage in his career. And for an ambitious black actor with Scott's energy, could there be any way but *up* the theatrical success ladder?

Scott, 37, sat in the living room of Dramatic Art Department chairman Dr. Arthur Housman Saturday — the background filled with the brass of the marching band's rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner" playing at nearby Kenan Stadium — and seemed remarkably at ease, though the play's premiere was but days away.

Scott spoke with studied diction — his "neither" rhyming with "hi, there" — and you quickly realize why such theatrical giants as Arthur Miller and Lorraine Hansbury have befriended him and composed roles for his unique talents.

His theatre credits read endlessly: a Broadway debut in Robert Rossen's ("The Hustler") "The Cool World," with which he netted the Variety Critic's Poll award as Broadway's most promising new actor; an off-Broadway debut in "Deathwatch," a role he accepted while still in college at Harvard and another feather in his cap since he claimed an Obie Award for his performance; roles in "The Blacks," "The Death of Bessie Smith," "The Boys in the Band," and others; directing experience with "Indians," "Waiting for Godot," "The Birthday Party," "The Glass Menagerie;" teaching work in theatre departments at Harvard, Brandeis, University of Connecticut, the University of North Carolina, and four others; and three fruitful summers at the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theater Center, the contact which now brings him to campus.

But there's no pretension evident — no pseudo-professionalism to his manner. Scott sees his rise as a natural thing.

"There's a terrific tendency to think that you plan out your life and that you have control over it. You really don't, though. You do up to a point. And then things start happening."

What happened to Scott was initially a prize speaking contest at Exeter. Brought up in an essentially white middle class environment — his father was a doctor — Scott had little black awareness. He was shy, unable to understand why other shunned him.



But thanks to a public speaking course and a prize winning reading of "God's Trombones" (which would become his trademark for the next decade), Scott learned that he could make people pay attention.

Then followed Harvard — "According to 'The Harvard Crimson,' I wrote, produced, directed, or appeared in 31 plays in the four years I was there, which is a bounteous plenty — and still get a degree." And then came "Deathwatch" at the first Yale Drama Festival, and then an invitation by the off-Broadway director to play the role in New York — and Hal Scott was off and running with co-stars George Maharis and Vic Morrow on another stage of his life.

"I started out in the business as an actor. And acting is still the thing I get greatest pleasure from doing, because you get maximum creative exposure and minimal responsibility. You're not answerable to anybody, you just take care of yourself and deliver that performance."

But the spinning Fates had more in store for him, and directing and teaching beckoned, pulling Scott away from the commercial New York theatre.

"I'm so tired of living out of a suitcase, I don't know what to do," says Scott, drinking some lemonade, the stage in Dr. Housman's living room jutting out prominently as Scott talks of his career.

"But it seems to have been what was meant for me in terms of staying busy doing things I think are meaningful and creative to do."

"During the time I was playing in 'The Boys in the Band,' I just came to realize that the commercial

theatre was dying all around me. I was going into that play, which was a great joy to do — otherwise I wouldn't have stayed in it for two years — nightly. But even so, occasionally, I had to take a breather. I'd take four weeks and go do "The Blacks" or I'd leave and do something else. And I began to realize then that if anything major were going to happen in the theatre it was going to happen outside of New York."

Scott's realization has since led him on a personal crusade of discovery — learning more about his craft, trying to aid regional theatre, and teaching in universities as an artist in residence.

Scott has this theory that "eventually the universities are going to house the professional theatre companies."

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1 Site of Taj Mahal  
2 Walk unsteadily

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