

# North Carolina drama gets new home after years of waiting

## Namesake Green sees 'flowering of dramatic arts'

By MARK SCANDLING

It was a first in 1940 when Paul Green, a white playwright, and Richard Wright, a black novelist, sat down together in a sweltering office in Bynum Gym to write a stage version of *Native Son* Wright's brutal novel about a young black boy's demise in Chicago.

It also will be a first tonight when the play they wrote returns to Chapel Hill to be presented in the Paul Green Theatre, the multi-million dollar theater that finally has been completed after 30 years of dreaming and planning.

Green, who graduated from UNC in 1921, is excited about the opening of the theater and about what it will mean to the future of dramatic arts in Chapel Hill.

"Having another place for the production of plays should mean a lot to the University... We ought to see a real flowering of dramatic arts now," Green explains.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright believes the University has the potential to become a tremendous center for the creative arts but that it is letting the opportunity slip away.

"I keep hollering the University ought to be a real hot spot of creative activity... We should work to develop it. We have the tradition, but the administration has got to realize this and really care about it," Green says.

"I here is no reason why the University of North Carolina couldn't become the Athens of the South," adds the Harnett County native.

The 84-year-old Green, who has taught philosophy and drama at UNC as well as writing plays, is devoted to fostering

this creative spirit. He feels the people and traditions of North Carolina offer an excellent starting point for an artistic flowering.

Echoing Professor Frederick Koch's advice to him to write about things close to you, Green says he feels that young artists should tap their experiences and backgrounds.

He uses the music department as an example: "We've got a tremendous storehouse of native North Carolina music in the department. We ought to have our young people working with it—writing it and playing it. Instead we are still too much interested in musicology—what Beethoven did, what Mozart did, what Benjamin Britten did. But we aren't producing any Mozarts or Brittens. There are some great opportunities being missed."

The same is true of the drama department, and this frustrates the playwright even more; for he feels that American theater is stronger than ever before, and its popularity is spreading like an infection.

He remembers back to his playwriting classes with Koch, who "made writing seem not too difficult." He recalls how he and his classmates would bring in ideas as simple as "I knew this man who..." or "Down in my neighborhood there is this guy who..." and, through discussions and writing plays slowly would emerge.

He asks, "Why aren't we doing it here now, the way we used to? Some good writers—Thomas Wolfe, Betty Smith, Elizabeth Lay and LeGette Blythe—got their start like this; writing scraps of dialogues and bits of plays," Green says. "But its not being done anymore, so I doubt we'll turn out as

many writers as we used to."

One lesson Green always has remembered since his early days as a writer was to write honestly, and this sense of honesty made his plays, whether they were historical dramas like *The Lost Colony* and *The Common Glory* or tense human dramas about rare struggles like *In Abraham's Bosom* and *Native Son*, so successful and inspiring.

If one belief pervades all of Green's writing, it would be his belief in working to make right prevail. He takes this idea from a song refrain in a play by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus.

"If we work hard enough, right will prevail," Green says, "but I'm not so optimistic to think that right will always prevail, yet if we work hard enough, more often than not, it will prevail."

And this, according to Green was what Richard Wright and he had in mind when they sat down 38 years ago to write a play that said something about America. He still sees this collaboration as a symbol of two races cooperating to achieve some worthwhile end.

Green is generous in his praise of Wright. "I admired him. He was so remarkable and what he did was so amazing. That he, a black boy born in Mississippi, could accomplish what he did was an amazing thing.

"The very fact that he did not give up, that he kept trying, struggling to be himself and to tell the story of his people is all very thrilling and inspiring," Green says.

*Native Son*, the story of Bigger Thomas, a "boy who got all wrong, couldn't find his place and wound up in the electric chair," is Wright's greatest work, Green says. The playwright says he feels the play has lost none of its impact either, for it is a



DTH/Alan Jernigan

play about a human struggle that is not enclosed by temporal bounds.

Green and Mrs. Richard Wright, who flew in from Paris for the opening, have been working together for the past week trying to write an authoritative script for publication. Green says the only addition to the original is that Bigger will not be presented as the victim of injustice, as Orson Welles presented him in the original 1941 production; instead, Bigger will recognize that he is responsible in part for his own demise.

Green says his reason for the addition is simply that "I have never met a person who didn't somehow feel that he had something to do with his own life."

Mark Scandling is arts editor for the Daily Tar Heel.

## Bust sculptor Hipp an art vet at 26

By PRISCILLA BRATCHER

Silent plaster busts have replaced the first and second graders who used to gather in the large corner room of the White Cross School. Twenty-five pairs of eyes stare, unblinking, from their shelves as the newcomer enters the room. But the atmosphere is friendly rather than ominous. Bright sunshine pours through bare windows; a cheerful tune can be heard from the stereo in the next room. The artist, a mound of shapeless clay in his hand, greets the visitor with an easy smile.

William Hipp III is a 26-year-old sculptor who recently opened his first one-man show at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh. A native of Charlotte, educated at UNCC, he now makes his home six miles west of here. The oldest of four children, Hipp began working with clay as a young boy on his grandparents' farm. Today, he is a serious, disciplined artist who has done portrait bronzes of former U.S. President James K. Polk; William Bobbitt, former chief justice of the N.C. Supreme Court; Albert Coates, professor emeritus of law at UNC; Sam Ervin, former U.S. senator from North Carolina; and North Carolina playwright Paul Green. The Green bust is displayed in the lobby of the new Paul Green Theatre.

Green sat for the bust two years ago and, Hipp says, was an excellent subject. "He knew just when to talk and when to be quiet," he says. "Despite the 60-year difference in our ages, a great deal of empathy grew between us."

At the time, Green was writing a play and was having a problem with one of the scenes, Hipp remembers. "Rhonda Wynn was here, and she was reading to him from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Suddenly, he became very thoughtful; his face cleared. He had solved his problem. And I said, 'That's it! That's the expression I want to capture.'"

Hipp works with clay initially, then a plaster mold and finally a plaster cast, which is sent to a company in New York to be bronzed. He creates a rough surface, he says, because the face on a bust is frozen but a person's features are fluid. "A human face is continually in motion," Hipp explains, "and when you try to get too naturalistic, you lose the sense of the person." He says the rough texture gives the bronze the semblance of motion and life.

For Hipp, it was especially important to create this feeling in the bust of Green. "He is ageless. In some ways he's a great deal more vital than I am. His social and political concerns are still very current, and I feel like an old cynical person next to him. His concern for people and causes has given him a great deal of pain, but there's not a drop of cynicism in him, and I find that admirable."

Hipp currently is working on a bust of Thomas Wolfe commissioned by the Morehead Foundation. He says he is dedicated to continuing his work with portraits, having little interest in branching into a more abstract style of sculpture. "The human form—what a man is—is something you could work with all your life, and yet you may only be able to catch a tiny fragment of its essence. There's something holy about that possibility, and I'm very moved by it."

The portraits of Bobbitt, Coates, Ervin and Green (a copy of which will be in the new theater) were commissioned by the Dialectic and Philanthropic Literary Societies Foundation of UNC and will be on display at the N.C. Museum of Art through Oct. 7.

Priscilla Bratcher is director of audience development for the Playmakers Repertory Company.

## Drama department chief Houseman lauds facility as welcome addition

By ANN SMALLWOOD

"I keep no scrapbooks."

Those four words spoken in an interview last week by Arthur L. Houseman, chairperson of the UNC drama department, reflect the character of a man who is unsentimental about the past and reserved about the future but who obviously thrives upon the present.

At present, the excitement at Carolina is today's dedication of the new Paul Green Theatre. But Houseman, who participated in the designing of five theaters and the building of four, says he doesn't like the limelight associated with openings. He says the "symbol of the building" is much more important.

Houseman, who came to UNC from Ohio State in 1971, will not take any credit for the construction of the Paul Green Theatre, saying the idea "was formed in the minds of people 30 years ago." He says the seed for the theater was actually planted the day the drama department's founder Frederick H. Koch, came here 60 years ago and is the product of the work of hundreds of people since then.

Houseman says though the UNC drama department has "the oldest amateur university tradition in the world," it has been limited by the quality of the laboratory theater. He compares the facilities to "a chemistry lab, 20 by 20 feet, with 10 breakers." He says the addition of the Paul Green Theatre should improve the situation significantly, especially for the student body at large.

Houseman says he believes it is important for all students to participate in "artistic enterprise" in some way during their college careers. "Most students spend too little time in creative activities... Students come out of drama classes with something they can't experience in any other class."

Houseman, who teaches both graduates and undergraduates, says, "What excites me is how students respond." He says he tries to teach students how to "tap ordinariness" in themselves, because he likes to see evidence of "personalities expanded, curiosity tickled and

radar sharpened."

As he has in the past, Houseman emphasizes his belief that quality theater education should include both active participation in performance and observation of good performances. "The best education for theater is the best theater. No one learns from a bad performance."

He says it is a great challenge to establish and maintain an environment within which learning is exciting and creative acts can take place. He says he thinks it is especially important for him to be in touch with the rest of the department, explaining his role as chairperson to be more the head of a committee of teachers than a dictator of policy. But for an "open-door chairman," distractions can be a problem, he adds.

He says that although, he often becomes discouraged by the "problems, papers and pettiness" of the job, he has learned that one secret to being a good educator is to always be somewhat dissatisfied. However, he tries not to worry too much about things over which he has no control and not to take problems home with him.

After six years at Chapel Hill, Houseman says he doesn't give much thought to the future except as far as it involves improving the department. He says he hopes, however, that he will be remembered as a man "who would lay his energy on the line." Otherwise, he says he cares nothing for a "bubble of reputation."

Houseman says it was important to him personally to have started something in students and audiences during his countless classes and performances. He says his love of theater was partially due to this beauty of its "ephemeral art. Nothing is a more moving thrill than the silence following a play which had a great impact, or the sight of an audience leaving a theater completely washed out by comedy."

Which is his favorite play or performance, then? In the words of Jose Ferrer: "My next one."

Ann Smallwood is assistant arts editor for the Daily Tar Heel.

Gordon Cureton stars

## 'Native Son' opens theater

*Native Son* revolves around Bigger Thomas, a young unemployed black man who lives with his family in a Chicago slum. The people in his life—his mother, sister, brother, buddies and girlfriend—are concerned about the anger and frustration which Bigger is barely able to control. He finds a job as chauffeur for a wealthy family and inadvertently murders his employers' daughter. The remainder of the play deals with his trial, during which questions are raised about his guilt in the face of society's treatment of blacks.

Bigger Thomas will be played by UNC senior Gordon Cureton. As Bigger, Cureton will make his first stage appearance.

The role of Vera Thomas, Bigger's sister, will be played by Shannon Spears, who is working toward a BFA degree at UNC. She performed with Playmakers Repertory Company last year in *Play It Again, Sam* and in *Streetcar Named Desire*.

Clarkston Hines who plays Buddy, Bigger's 11-year-old brother, is in the 6th grade at Carrboro Elementary School. He appeared at Chapel Hill High School this summer in *Shenandoah*.

Bigger's girlfriend, Clara Mears, will be played by Debra Woodward. A graduate of Duke University, she is working toward a Ph.D. in English at UNC.

Other major roles will be played by Lyndon Fuller as Jan Erlone, a young radical

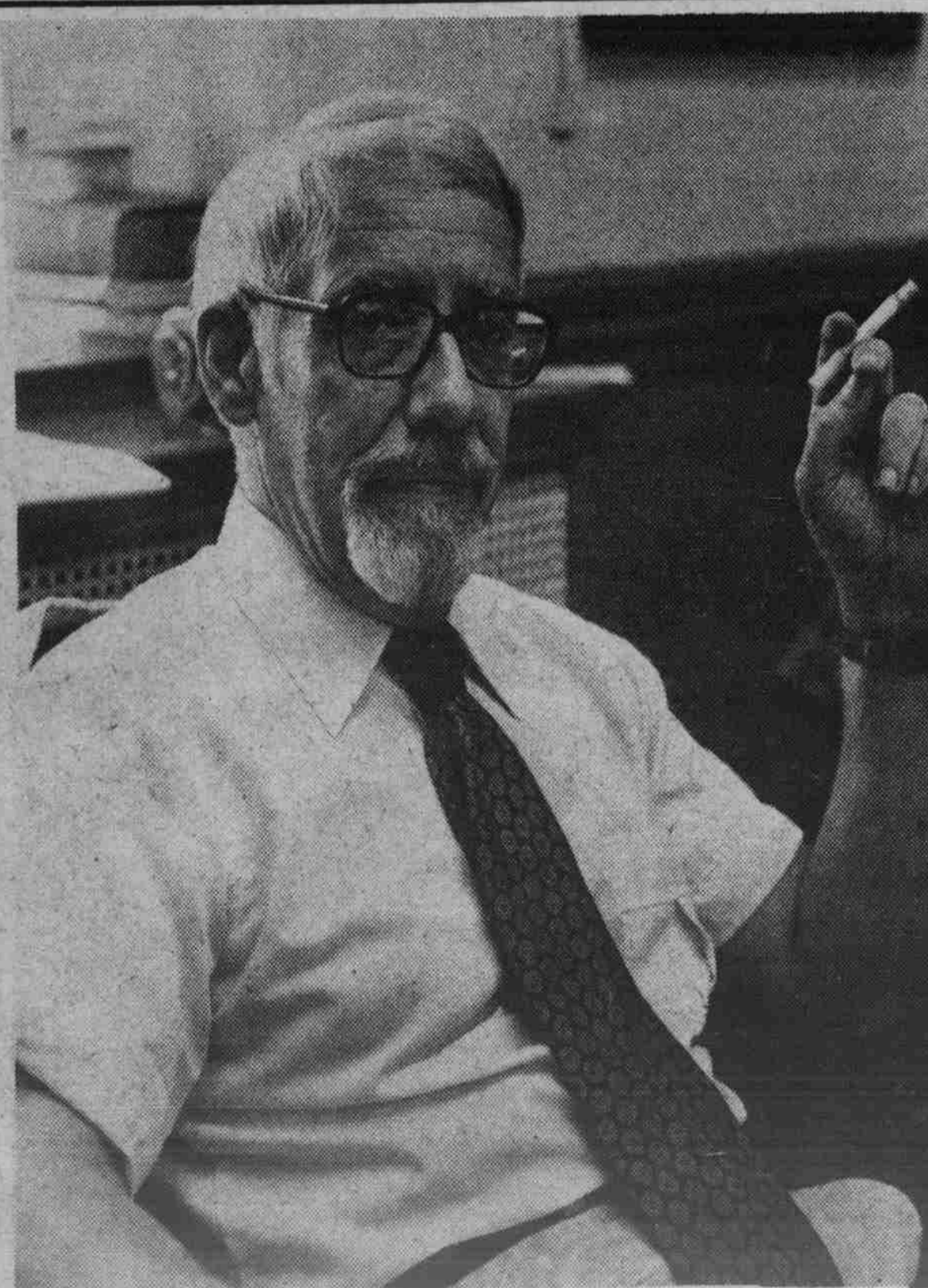


Gordon Cureton

sympathetic to Bigger's cause, and by Lloyd Borstelmann as Edward Max, the defense attorney.

Borstelmann is a professor of psychology at Duke University and in the past has appeared with Carolina Reader's Theatre and Carolina Playmakers.

*Native Son* will be performed at 8 p.m. Saturday and Oct. 5-7. Call 933-1121 for reservations. Ticket prices are \$4 for the general public, \$3 for PRC season subscribers and \$2 for UNC students and senior citizens.



DTH/Billy Newman

Drama department head Arthur Houseman