



## Smithsonian Institution

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

### Playbill for Hair

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the rounds, I would go to a party and somebody would ask, "What do you do?" I'd say, "I'm an actor." Right away the standard reply was, "Yes, but what you do?"

Jimmy Shine, the play I'm acting in on Broadway, examines what success is. It uses humor to cut through to truth. Basically, the plot is about a young guy in his early thirties, who became a painter because his best friend talked him into it. But instead of becoming a painter too, the best friend is persuaded by his father to go into business, where he makes a lot of money while Jimmy struggles to survive in a loft. The interesting thing is that you never know if Jimmy is a good painter. What you do know, however, is that painting is what he wants to do. "I'm a painter," he says at one point. "I have to paint. I have to do one thing in my life that makes sense. Before I lay down and drop dead." The question the play poses is: if that's how he feels, how can society judge him a failure?

During the years I was a struggling actor, I used to tell myself, "If I ever make it, I know exactly what I'm going to do." I realize now that it's all very complicated.

It's not the money. There was never much danger that I'd go crazy there — after all with me, it wasn't a case of someone who grew up on the lower East Side and never had a dime. I came from a solid middle class background. My father is a furniture designer. The thing I have to guard against is losing perspective. Before The Graduate I was beginning to establish myself as a character actor Off-Broadway. I had some good notices. I even won an Obie (Off-Broadway award) for Journey of the Fifth Horse. The recognition I was getting was in balance with what I was doing. I could take it nice and slow and not feel my soul had been stolen.

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It's not the money. There was never much danger that I'd go crazy there — after all with me, it wasn't a case of someone who grew up on the lower East Side and never had a dime. I came from a solid middle class background. My father is a furniture designer. The thing I have to guard against is losing perspective. Before The Graduate I was beginning to establish myself as a character actor Off-Broadway. I had some good notices. I even won an Obie (Off-Broadway award) for Journey of the Fifth Horse. The recognition I was getting was in balance with what I was doing. I could take it nice and slow and not feel my soul had been stolen.

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tionally to become an authority on all kinds of things — psychology, medicine, politics. Actors find pretty limited fun — the things they read, the people they talk to, the subjects they talk about all usually relate to the work they're doing. I don't think many of them are prepared for a sudden flood into prominence and yet about all of them are susceptible to it. After all, actors have ego problems. Why else would they need all those people in the audience to applaud for them. So if you live for a long time with a few that you're making much, and then if you are suddenly told you are everything that you heard you weren't — well, I think it's very easy to go overboard and believe it all, every second of it.

I'm trying to guard against this kind of confusion by changing my life as little as possible. I use the same friends. I live, if not in the same apartment, at least in a similar one on the same street. I've incorporated myself so that all the money I make goes directly into the corporation and I am paid only a small salary. And, perhaps most important of all, I am trying not to tell me in my work. I am trying to accept only parts that I believe in, to use only characters, who are neither here nor there, but merely people. As a result, I have some influence and I hope I can use it to portray what's real up and down, even at the expense of my own image or character.

Of course, in spite of all these good intentions, my ego sometimes gets a little out of hand. Whenever this happens I remind myself of the night I threw pictures out me in California to attend the Golden Globe awards. It was my first exposure to that sort of thing — you know, the telexes, the show-business luncheon — and I was feeling like quite a star. Then just as I stepped out of my car an onslaught of humor rained up to me. "I know you, I know you," he said. "You're wholesome and I saw you in what you did." □

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an opportunity to become an authority on all kinds of things – psychology, morality, politics. Actors lead pretty limited lives – the things they read, the people they talk to, the subjects they talk about all usually relate to the work they're doing. I don't think many of them are prepared for a sudden thrust into prominence and yet almost all of them are susceptible to it. After all, actors have ego problems. Why else would they need all those people in the audience to applaud for them. So if you live for a long time with a fear that you're nothing much, and then if you are suddenly told you are everything that you feared you weren't – well, I think it's very easy to go overboard and believe it all, every second of it.

I'm trying to guard against this kind of seduction by changing my life as little as possible. I see the same friends. I live, if not in the same apartment, at least in a similar one on the same street. I've incorporated myself so that all the money I make goes directly into the corporation and I am paid only a small salary. And, perhaps most important of all, I'm trying not to sell out in my work. I am trying to accept only parts that I believe in, to create only characters, who are neither heroes nor villains, but merely people. As a celebrity I have some influence and I hope I can use it to portray what's real in our society, even at the expense of my own image or charisma.

Of course, in spite of all these good intentions, my ego sometimes gets a little out of hand. Whenever this happens I remind myself of the night Embassy pictures sent me to California to attend the Golden Globe awards. It was my first exposure to that sort of thing – you know, the tuxedo, the chauffeur-driven limousine – and I was feeling like quite a star. Then just as I stepped out of my car an autograph hunter rushed up to me. "I know you. I know you," he said. You're whatshisname and I saw you in whatjamacallit."



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