

Scott pressed into acting duties at the last moment

On Broadway, a playwright becomes an actor, saving a show

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP) — Keenan Scott II made his Broadway acting debut this week in “Thoughts of a Colored Man,” which is a remarkable milestone. It’s even more remarkable when you consider he also wrote it.

The actor-turned-playwright was pressed into acting duties at the last moment Tuesday night to keep his show open while all around Broadway battles spikes in COVID-19. He saved at least one performance.

“Like any other actor, I’ve always wanted to make my Broadway acting debut in whatever show wanted to hire me,” Scott says. “I did not know it was going to happen like this and on my show during the same season.”

His heroic efforts saved the night but it wasn’t enough. Late Thursday, COVID-19 claimed “Thoughts of a Colored Man,” joining “Waitress” and “Jagged Little Pill” as shows closed this winter due in part to rising infection rates.

Scott’s path to the stage was frantic on Tuesday. He had left the theater and was on a subway platform waiting for a train to take him home to Brooklyn when he got the call from producers: Come back to the John Golden Theatre right now.

Two non-COVID-19 illnesses had already stretched the seven-person cast but now an actor had tested positive for COVID-19. While everyone waited for a PCR result to see if it was a false positive, Scott was being readied.

He was hooked up to a microphone, crewmembers were piecing together a costume for him and checking his shoe size. A stage manager printed out the script and Scott highlighted his lines. At 7:55 p.m., the second test came back - positive.

Five minutes later, Scott was onstage.

“It was just beautiful to be up there with my brothers - we are all family now - and for me to be able to step in to save the show for that night so the audience can get what they deserve. They purchased tickets. They’re traveling to come see us. They are also battling and trying to stay diligent with being safe with this new variant but still wanting to come out and support us.”

Characters

“Thoughts of a Colored Man” is made up of related vignettes and set over the course of a single day in Brooklyn, where seven Black men discuss gentrification, violence, racial and sexual identity and what it means to be part of a community. Several characters, ranging in age from late teens to mid-60s, have specific themes to illustrate - Wisdom, Anger and Happiness.

Scott went on as Wisdom, a 65-year-old man. While the playwright had performed various characters in his play over the years at workshops and festivals, he had never played Wisdom before. But he knew the blocking and cues, and had originally trained as an actor and was a

slam poet. He went on with a script in hand.

“That was a challenge of sorts, but it was really great to be up there. The actor me always wanted to be up there,” Scott says. “There wasn’t even enough time for me to get nervous or even wrap my head around what was happening. I think if I would’ve known the day before or something like that, you know, there’s time for nerves to build.”

Multiple Broadway shows, including “Hamilton,” “Aladdin,” “Mrs. Doubtfire” and “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child,” have called off performances in recent days because of breakthrough virus cases in their all-vaccinated casts and crews.

Other creators who have gone into their own Broadway shows include Sara Bareilles slipping into “Waitress,” Sting in “The Last Ship” and Green Day’s frontman Billie Joe Armstrong, who made several onstage visits to his show “American Idiot.” But they all had days or weeks to prepare.

“My wife actually said, ‘Are you proud of what you did tonight?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I am.’ Because as a performer, I know how hard it is even when you have four weeks of rehearsal and you’re fully prepared,” Scott says. “So to do what I did in a short amount of time - you know, half a costume, being able to hit my mark, hit the lights, hit most of my cues, being able to engage with my actors - I was truly proud of what I did.”

Stage

Variety



This image released by Sony Pictures Classics shows Milena Smit, (left), and Penelope Cruz in a scene from ‘Parallel Mothers.’ (AP)

Film

Almodóvar’s film packed with wild twists and turns

Cruz delivers in ‘Parallel Mothers’

By Lindsey Bahr

Two women meet in a maternity ward and their lives become inextricably linked in Pedro Almodóvar’s gentle but penetrating “Parallel Mothers.”

It’s a film that on one level plays like a melodrama, with wild twists and turns fitting of soap opera cliffhangers. But there is something deeper going on too, underneath the beautiful surface and base pleasures of plot and simply watching Penélope Cruz through Almodóvar’s loving lens. “Parallel Mothers,” at its core, is about Spain and the lingering traumas of the Spanish Civil War, which robbed a generation of fathers, husbands and sons.

This loss haunts Cruz’s Janis, an accomplished magazine photographer, who takes it upon herself to ask the forensic anthropologist she’s photographing if he’d consider excavating the site where her great-grandfather and his peers were executed and dumped under Francisco Franco’s regime. They know who is in the grave and where it is and for decades have passed the story down hoping that at some point their ancestors will be given proper burials.

Then we don’t hear anything about this project for quite some time. It might seem at first that Almodóvar is abandoning this excavation plot rather quickly. The anthropologist, Arturo (Israel Elejalde), is very handsome, Janis begins an affair and next thing you know she’s about to give birth, alone. But Almodóvar is just patiently building layers of life that he will eventually bring back around to this original loss.

Though Arturo is not in there to see the delivery of their child, Janis does have a roommate, a teenager, Ana (the fierce newcomer Milena Smit), who is also about to give birth without a partner. Janis wants a child. Ana does not. Soon they find themselves smitten with their daughters and start to negotiate life with a tiny, helpless attachment. Though they’re both single mothers, they are privileged ones. Ana’s

family is wealthy and Janis can afford a maid and live-in nanny. Even if it’s all a little romanticized, Almodóvar gives it room to breathe and it’s lifelike enough.

Histories

But of course things start to get complicated. Arturo doubts the child is his and Janis soon finds it’s not even hers. You can probably partially guess where this is going, but “Parallel Mothers” has more than a few surprises up its brightly colored sleeves. The dramatic turns are almost beside the point, since throughout Almodóvar is also quietly planting a garden of family histories, nontraditional parenting arrangements, complicated mothers and absent fathers and many, many losses. It’s these details that build the film’s rich foundation.

Aitana Sánchez-Gijón, as Ana’s actor mother, is a particular standout and would fit right in with the complex mothers of another of the year’s standouts, “The Lost Daughter.” And it’s a gorgeous showcase for Cruz. Hopefully she and Almodóvar have more than a few more films in them.

“Parallel Mothers” might not be as transcendently cinematic as his last, “Pain & Glory,” and perhaps part of that has to do with the fact that it was filmed during a pandemic, but its emotional core is no less powerful even if it’s a little more subtle. This one takes a beat to sink in, but it’s worth it.

“Parallel Mothers,” a Sony Pictures Classics release in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for “some sexuality.” Running time: 122 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

Also:

**NEW YORK:** More than a decade ago, Matthew Viragh was a Texan with a dream. He wanted to serve moviegoers booze and prepared food as they sat in their seats. In Brooklyn. But he had a state Prohibition-era liquor ban to contend with first.

**OKLAHOMA CITY:** “Home Alone” actor Devin Ratray surrendered to authorities in Oklahoma after he was accused of assaulting his girlfriend, police said.

Ratray, who played older brother Buzz McAllister in the 1990 Christmas movie, was released from jail shortly after his booking on two domestic assault and battery complaints, police said.

Ratray, 44, was in Oklahoma City earlier this month for an event called “Buzzed with Buzz,” which was promoted as a screening of the film along with a question-and-answer session with Ratray.

An affidavit says Ratray choked his girlfriend and said “This is how you die,” but Ratray denies those allegations, Oklahoma City TV station KFOR reported.

“Mr Ratray denies he ever laid a hand on her or did anything in regards to anything like that,” his attorney Scott Adams said. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** The artificial intelligence at the heart of a new art exhibit, “me + you,” does not judge you necessarily, but it does analyze and interpret what you have to say.

Sponsored by Amazon Web Services, the sculpture by artist Suchi Reddy listens to what you have to say about the future and renders your sentiment in a display of colored lights and patterns.

The artwork is a centerpiece of a new exhibit at the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building, which is opening to the public for the first time in 20 years.

Viewers are invited to interact with the sculpture, which listens for the words “My future is ...” at several circular listening posts integrated into the sculpture.

The words and the sentiments behind them are then reinterpreted as a pattern of colored lights. On a very basic level, positive emotions tend to translate into soothing blends of blue, green and purple. Words that suggest anger might prompt a cascade of colors on the opposite spectrum of the color wheel. If you use a swear word, the lights will turn red.

No matter the sentiment, Reddy said, “I want to show all human emotion as beautiful.”

And the interpretations will evolve and become more nuanced over time as the artificial intelligence progresses. Swami Sivasubramanian, vice president of Amazon Machine Learning at Amazon Web Services, said the artwork incorporates sentiment analysis that not only decodes the meaning of words but a speaker’s



Reddy

Ratray

sentiment behind the words. Sivasubramanian said Amazon contributed 1,200 hours of programming to serve as the backbone of the artwork’s machine learning.

“Machine learning is one of our most transformative technologies,” he said. “I’m excited for people to engage with machine learning in

an artistic setting.”

The artwork utilizes various aspects of machine learning, including basic speech-to-text technology.

A companion website lets people enter their thoughts over the internet and receive a visual interpretation of their sentiment that is also added to the archive.

In an era of deep skepticism over the data collected by Big Tech, Reddy and her team were careful to avoid data collection of any kind other than people’s thoughts about the future. No video is recorded and there is nothing that tracks people’s expressions back to them, Reddy said. (AP)

Features

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