

Thursday, May 6, 1982 O&E

Performer finds roles that fit like a glove

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

BEING A FORMER Golden Gloves boxing champion, as well as a professional actor makes Gregory Edward Gray of Southfield feel that some roles are a perfect fit.

The young black actor currently is playing the role of Eddie Satin, slick fight promoter and manager in the musical "Golden Boy" at Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre in Bloomfield Township.

He also is one of the actors being considered for the starring role of Joe Louis, the world's champion, in an upcoming made-for-TV movie about the Detroit boxer's life.

For an interview at the office of the Eccentric Newspapers in Birmingham, Gray arrived a little late, after phoning first to explain his car had gotten a flat tire.

"I PRAYED on it," he said later, explaining his reaction to being late for the interview. Most people wouldn't pray over a flat tire, but Gray has found prayer important to his career goals and his entire life's purpose.

An easy-going manner, a smile and determination help Gray pursue his dreams. Seated in an office chair, he had a loose-leaf notebook in his lap with newspaper clips about his past performances.

Not apparent at first glance was the Bible, held lightly on his knee. But when the actor started to talk about his life, he soon brought God into the conversation.

"I have lived a life in a very spiritual way," he said. "I'm a born-again Christian. I walk with Him every day."

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HE NAMED, as actors he admires, Vincent Price, George C. Scott, Sidney Poitier, the Fonzes. "That's the direction I'm going. I believe they got there because of the human spirit."

Gray would like to go into the ministry and plans to take courses six months from now. In the meantime, he continues to develop his performing talents.

The script for the TV drama about Joe Louis is called "God Is on Our Side," and Gray considers that a nice touch.

"My career is sort of similar to Joe, and I look somewhat similar to him," he said. The actor would be called upon to play a younger Joe and an older Joe and have some boxing ability.

Gray, who has a full head of dark hair, shaved his head when he played the starring role of prizefighter Jack Jefferson in the powerful drama "The Great White Hope" for the Civic Players Black Theatre in Kalamazoo.

"BALDNESS RUNS in my family," he said with a grin, "and I was afraid my hair wouldn't grow back."

The Detroit-born actor's father was a Golden Gloves champion in the service. "I was raised to fill his shoes and dream," Gray said. Gray used to box in the living room with his brother, who is a year younger.

His brother had a damaging blow, Gray recalls. With a father who was a professional trainer and, "from scared of being hit by my brother," Gregory soon was boxed into a Golden Gloves champ.

He was on the national Olympic Trials boxing team in 1972, in addition to being a Golden Gloves champ from 1966-72.

But Gray didn't want to limit himself to what he considers the cliché of a black man's road to success through a boxing career.

AT CASS Technical High School he was motivated by a teacher, Pierre Rener, who taught him techniques in acting and also "to be strong, open-minded, willing to accept things as they were, to adjust to things in an honest way."

Later in the interview, Gray returned to the topic of his favorite teacher. "He's a white man, but he was about the most inspiring person I met in my life. That opened my eyes. You realize it's a person, not skin color."

After high school, Gray went on to pursue his bachelor of fine arts degree in drama at Michigan State University and his master's degree at Stephens College in Los Angeles. He received strong critical praise for his roles in "The Great White Hope," and "Raisin in the Sun," both of which he also directed, in Kalamazoo.

He also starred as Dale Jackson ("D.J.") in the Civic Theatre production of "Medal of Honor Rag" and directed the Black Theater Company's "Purlie."

He has appeared in productions at Wayne State University and the University of California, as well as on the campuses of U-M and St. Stephens.



Actor Gregory Gray, a graduate of Cass Technical High School and Michigan State University, is appearing in "Golden Boy" at the Will-O-Way Apprentice Theater. While acting, he plans to study for the ministry.

Big musical 'Golden Boy' overwhelms theater group

Performances of the Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre production of the musical "Golden Boy" continue at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays through May 15 at Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre, 775 W. Long Lake Road, Bloomfield Township. The production moves to the Eagle Theatre, 13 S. Saginaw, Pontiac, for

review

performances at 8:30 p.m. May 21-22 and 28-29. For tickets at \$5 call 644-4418.

By Margo Parker
special writer

The lovely voices of the two leading performers cannot overcome the other inadequacies in Will-O-Way Apprentice Theatre's current staging of "Golden

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