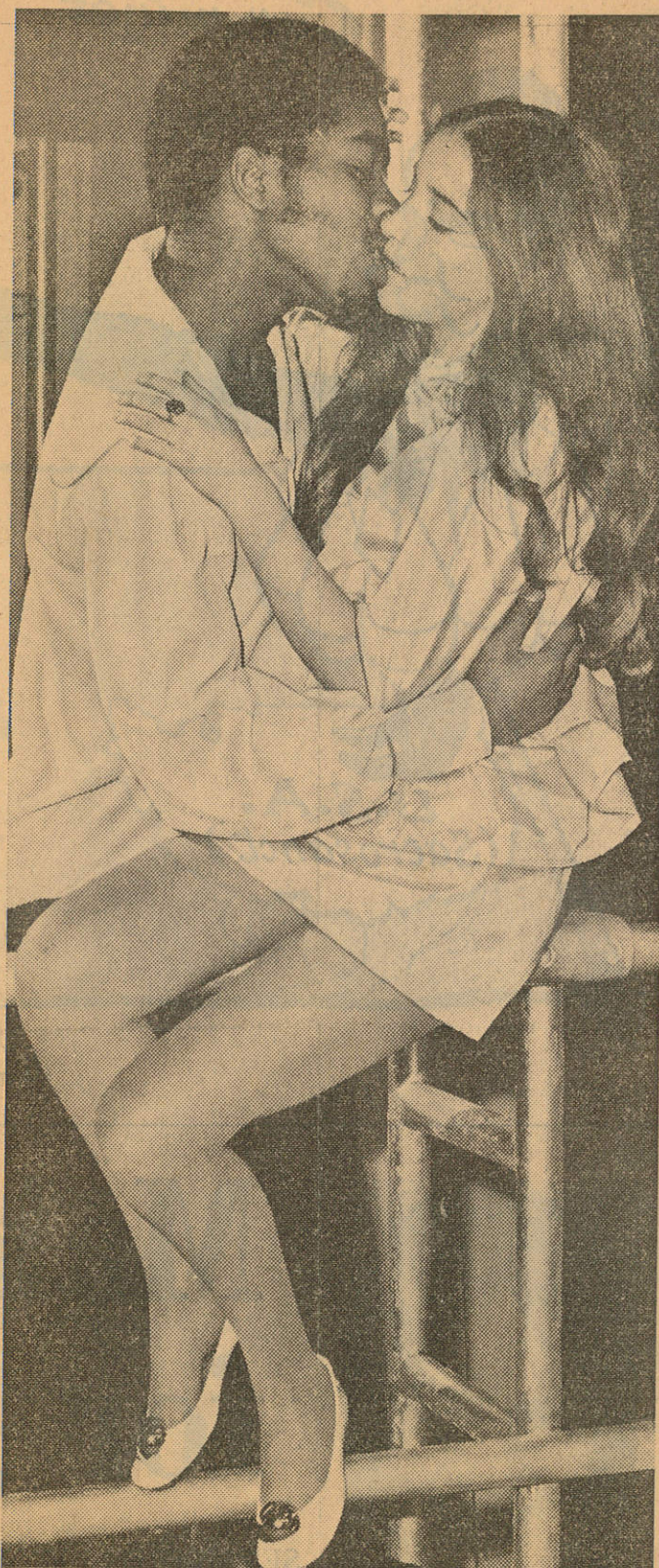


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Dereck and Scilla, setting a fashion

Romeo Dereck gives the old story a *Young* new look

SHAKESPEARE'S words are about the only things that don't change in a new-look college production of "Romeo and Juliet."

But the most startling innovation is Romeo himself. He is played by a Negro actor.

Jamaican-born Dereck Tapper, aged 20, plays opposite 22-year-old Scilla Nicolls, who is a traditional golden-haired Juliet. Both are students at St. Luke's Teacher Training College at Exeter, where the play opens on Monday.

And if the audience finds the casting unusual, the stars themselves are not worried about kissing on the stage.

Said Scilla, who lives in Stevenage, Herts: "Right from the beginning it never seemed we were doing anything unusual."

So good

"I don't think there was anyone else in it really. He seemed so good as Romeo."

Dereck came to England with his family when he was four and now lives in Kensington. He said: "It is no novelty to me. I have been in England so long I feel multi-racial."

"I have had white girl friends and coloured girl friends but they are just girls. After all, I started life with a Jewish father and a Christian mother."

Director Mrs. Mollie Penn, the college's senior lecturer in drama, has done more than create the first coloured Romeo.

The girls wear miniskirts, the men gay trendy gear, and the production is set among the wealthy jet set at an international playground called Verona Beach.

Said Mrs. Penn, a former Old Vic actress: "Not one of Shakespeare's words has had to be altered. It shows the play really is timeless."