



Jonathan Perugia for The Wall Street Journal at Her Majesty's Theatre

## Alistair Scott

Former job:

Equity-research analyst

New job: Actor

**A**listair Scott, 51 years old, still remembers the day he realized he had to choose between his day job as an investment banker at Merrill Lynch Asia and his passion for acting.

It was eight years ago at the final dress rehearsal for a production of "Hamlet" in which he was playing Polonius. As the curtain fell for intermission at Hong Kong's Fringe Club, Mr. Scott dashed up to the roof in Shakespearean costume to close a deal for a major Chinese telecommunications company by phone.

"I can't juggle all this much longer," he thought to himself. But it would be another three years before he actually left banking for the stage.

Mr. Scott always loved acting, but at Oxford he took the "sensible route" and studied history. After graduating, he went into banking, squeezing in acting turns in local productions—Prospero in "The Tempest"; Aston in Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker."

Meanwhile his banking career took the typical climb: He arrived in Hong Kong with the private bank Dresdner Kleinwort Benson in 1994. Five years later, he was earning a high six-figure salary at Merrill Lynch running research on telecom, media and Internet companies in Asia. But Mr. Scott "was always wondering where this was all going."

On a whim during a business trip to London in 2003, he visited the Central School of Speech and Drama.

"I went in for a chat," says Mr. Scott, and sat

down with Rob Clare, who established the school's masters program in classical acting. "I told him I had just played Prospero and he said, 'Get your jacket off and let's do some work.' I came out drenched with sweat and thought: This is what I want to do."

To his amazement, he was offered a place in the classical acting masters program. But courses began in autumn 2003, and he and his wife, Melissa, had just adopted two toddlers in Hong Kong. They couldn't move before settling the girls, ages 2 and 3.

"I was worried that was the end of the whole opportunity," he says.

He was wrong. Two years later, in September 2005, Mr. Scott—then 46—took an early-retirement package from Merrill Lynch and was again accepted at the Central School of Speech and Drama.

Four years on, Mr. Scott has carved out a life that combines acting with some corporate training and video work for consulting and marketing firms in London. Last year, he performed during the summer repertory season, including a turn as a nightclub owner in Jim Cartwright's "Little Voice." But for now, it's back to the audition trail.

"Our income is still very sporadic, back to a modest five figures, and we are basically living on savings and investments," Mr. Scott says.

His banking days bought the family a \$2 million, six-bedroom home in leafy Hampstead, and they still have a three-bedroom holiday house in Bali, but the collapse of Merrill Lynch last year has hurt the family's investment income. "The dividend has effectively disappeared," says Mr. Scott.

Even so, in his new life, he is more relaxed and enjoys spending time with his daughters, now 9 and 10. "I loved Hong Kong, but you did get that acid-churning feeling of working until 3 a.m. then making sure you are up again at 7 a.m. for a call," he says.