

Gateway interview: Blair Haynes

To fan research into performance

interview by Dean Bennett and Gilbert Bouchard

Since graduating from the U of A's Bachelor of Fine Arts program in 1979, Ontario born actor Blair Haynes has travelled from one end of the prairies to the other, doing shows.

Last Thursday, an overcrowded newsroom forced Haynes to a remote corner of *The Gateway Photo Directorate* where he granted this interview.

Gateway: Could you talk a little bit about your professional background and training?

Haynes: Well let's start with training. I'm a graduate of the University of Alberta Bachelor of Fine arts program, I graduated five years ago. I think it was '79. Is that right? Five years ago? Well it's getting to be six years ago. I'm old. I was very happy with my training here. I think the program really does give students who graduate a grasp of the tools they'll need in the profession. No training program can teach you all of what the profession is. There's lessons to be learned in the profession that can only be learned with experience in the profession.

I'm not from Alberta. I grew up in Ontario in, uh, Wayne Gretzky's home town — Brantford.

I went to York (University) in Toronto for a year before I came out west and I've stayed here ever since. When I graduated I got work right away. It's always a combination of luck and circumstances to getting jobs in this business.

When I left school I did the Citadel on Wheels tour for a season. Since that time I've done a couple of shows every year at the Citadel and when I haven't been working there I've been happy to work at the smaller theatres. I think I've worked with every theatre company in this city except for Stage West for some odd reason. And when I haven't been working in town here I've been working in Saskatchewan and B.C.

Gateway: What research did you do to prepare for the role of Doc. What general research procedures do you follow for all your roles?

Haynes: It depends on the role whether I want to go into a lot of research or not. When you read any script you look for something you seem to understand, something you understand in a personal way. And if you can find that early, that's great because then you just keep fanning it into a performance.

With *Doc* you're asking "Did I do a lot of research into doctors and GPs?" I did none, as a matter of fact. When I was in Calgary doing *Season's Greetings* I visited with *Doc* playwright Sharon Pollock, and we went

over parts of the script. I read parts of the script for her and she gave me some very useful pointers. This was several months before we actually began rehearsal.

Sharon is not only a good writer. She communicates very well and I really appreciate the time she spent with me. Actually, I really appreciate it because her car got towed away while we sat there talking.

Sharon was a sessional member of the drama faculty when I was getting my acting training at the University. That was the first time I ran into her. Knowing Sharon helps an awful lot with this play because its based on her dad and herself. And so, looking at her was my research.

Probably the most research I have ever done on a part is when I played Napoleon Bonaparte in G.B. Shaw's *The Man of Destiny* which I did last year for Nexus Theatre. That was a lot of fun. I enjoy doing research. I only do it when I feel compelled.

Gateway: What role has challenged you the most?

Haynes: The role I'm playing right now in *Doc* is probably, at this point in my career, the most challenging. I didn't have very much rehearsal time to put *Doc* together. I only had to play Napoleon at one age. With *Doc* I have to create his whole life or the parts of it that are pertinent to what you see on stage. I have to play him from age 19 to age 73. I'm not a doctor. I don't really know too much about being a doctor, so I have to imagine. I'm not like the character at all.

Gateway: What future career plans do you have? Do you plan to do more movie or T.V. work?

Haynes: I think we all would like to do more movie and T.V. work because that's where the bucks are. There isn't enough movie and T.V. work in this city to really make your living totally on it. But when it comes along, it pays so much more than theatre work, it's crazy, I mean, I did a week and a half of "extra" work on the motion picture *Draw* with Kirk Douglas and James Coburn. In a week and a half I made eighteen hundred

dollars. And this is something that uses none of my skills. I mean, I'm not "stretched" in any sort of way. I'm standing around waiting most of the time and I'm getting paid this money. And that's on the low end of the pay scale. That's just as a general extra whereas even working at the Citadel, in an "A" house, I would not make that much money in two weeks.

There is a definite technique to T.V. and movie acting. It is different in subtle ways compared to the stage. You only become adept at it with experience. And there's not a lot of opportunities in Edmonton to become adept.

My future plans? If American immigration says I'm okay, then I go to Cincinnati in April to do *Amadeus* at the Cincinnati Playhouse. And then, I come back to workshop a bunch of plays for Workshop West. They are putting together a playwright's circle for the summer. I'm also going to direct a play for this year's summer Fringe Festival. Then the winter season begins again and who knows what's going to happen.



Blair Haynes (seen here with Judith Haynes): Playing the most challenging role of his career in *Doc*.

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