

Entertainment

Walt and Roy review and interview with author

Disney play lacking in animation

Walt and Roy
Theatre Network
til December 15

review by Gilbert Bouchard

There's something missing from Michael McKinlay's new play *Walt and Roy*, playing at Theatre Network. In the words of the play's protagonist, the fictionalized Walt Disney, "that's a terrible story, it's plotless."

McKinlay creates a devilish duo of characters as he pits the two Disney brothers against each other, yet though his play has a certain tension, style and wit, nothing happens.

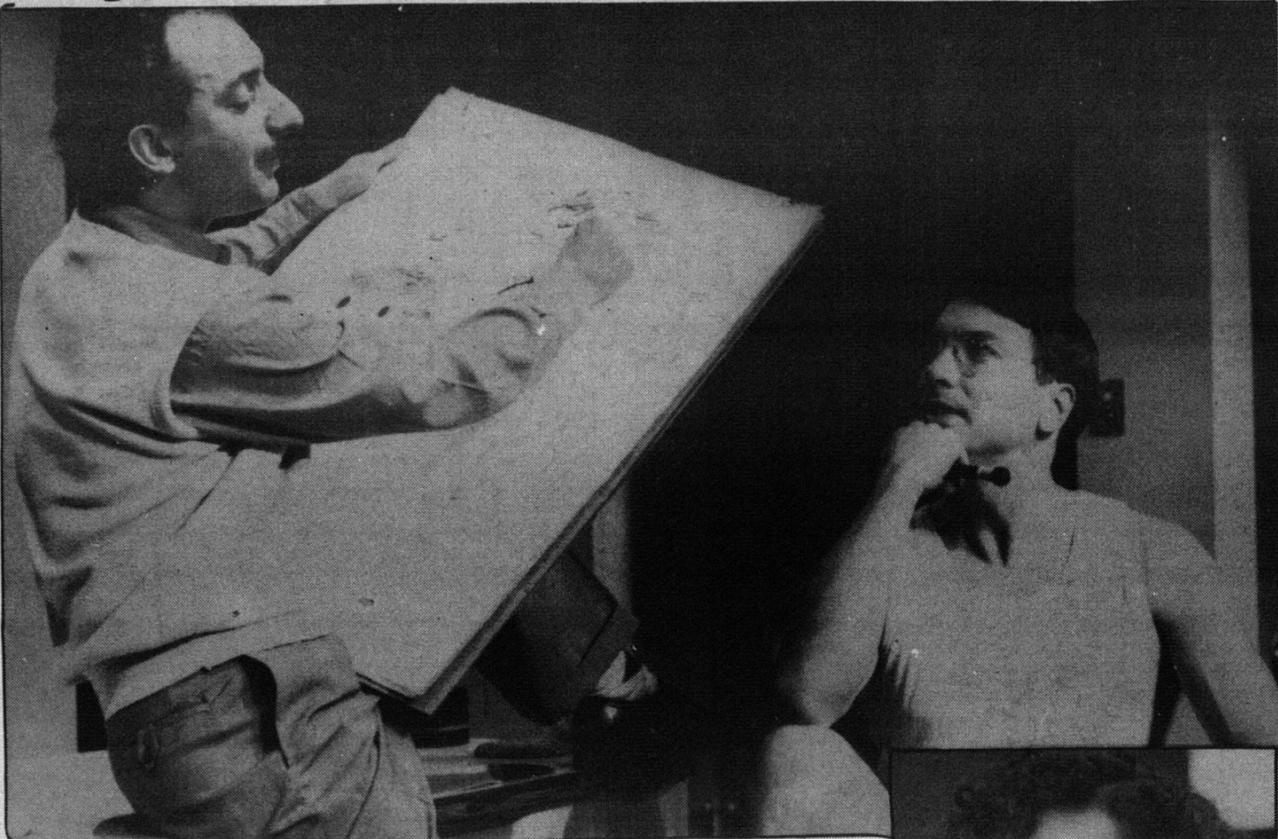
Set in Disney's studio in 1936, on the night before Walt and his brother Roy are to approach the bankers for further funds to complete their first full length feature (*Snow White*), the play gives the audience a unique picture of "Uncle Walt."

In *Walt and Roy*, Walt virtually holds his brother hostage overnight in his office and psychologically tortures him. If that isn't a unique view of Walt, I don't know what is.

McKinlay depicts Walt as an unbalanced genius and a drunk with suicidal tendencies, whose behaviour is totally unpredictable, if not psychopathic.

The tension between the Disney brothers is that between the artist (Walt) who decries the lack of his brother's imagination, and the business man (Roy, the financial whiz who kept Walt solvent) who decries his brother's lack of responsibility. Walt's creative madness is foiled by Roy's staid practical nature.

In fact, I don't think there's anything wrong with McKinlay's characterizations. His characters are well-rounded, logical and relate well to each other. Too bad that the play gives the characters nothing to do. For example, though the play is set on the night before the re-negotiation of funds for *Snow White*, the brothers more or less treat the meeting with the bankers and the getting of



Walt and Roy: (top center and bottom right) Blair Haynes and David Mann; (right) playwright David McKinlay

extra funds as a fait accompli. At one point in the play, Roy questions Walt on the validity of the project and is dismissed out of hand and rapidly by him. I was left to wonder why that particular night was chosen. As far as I'm concerned, any night would have done.

The characters are presented to us whole and complete and don't evolve during the

course of the play. What we see is akin to a dramatic workshop — two independent characters meet in a predetermined setting and interact with each other. What is missing, as far as I'm concerned, is character development. McKinlay's characters interact, but do they evolve because of that interaction?

The end result is a play that drags. The brothers say everything they have to say in the first half-hour and beat the same point to death for the next two hours. The play becomes exposition instead of demonstration.

Theatre Network did the best it could and the production outshone the play. Technical values were high, there was marvelous use of limited facilities, and fantastic performances by Blair Haynes (Walt) and David Mann (Roy). The performances alone are worth the ticket price.

Too bad that production values just aren't enough by themselves.

In the end, we are left with a long, pointless (though witty) episode that should have been cut back to a 45-minute one-act play.

interview by Gilbert Bouchard and Dean Bennett

Playwright Michael D.C. McKinlay is definitely the story of hometown alumnus makes good. Recipient of three separate Alberta Culture playwrighting awards, McKinlay at present has two plays in Edmonton theatres: *Walt and Roy* is at Theatre Network, and *The Haunted Man* is at the Nexus.

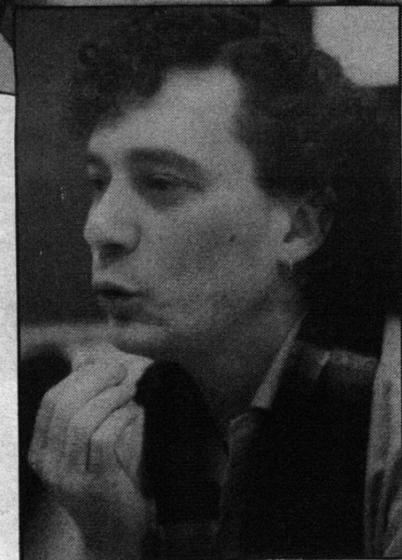
Last Friday, Mr. McKinlay came by *The Gateway* offices and granted this interview: **Gateway:** What made you decide to write *Walt and Roy*?

McKinlay: One inspiration to write the play came when I went to Disneyland at age 27. I couldn't believe that somebody could spend millions of dollars creating this from his imagination. I think Disney's ideas for the park came when he took his daughter to an amusement park and realized there was nothing for him to do. There was nothing there for adults.

Walt and Roy is essentially the story of two brothers. Roy is the brains; if it hadn't been for him, they would have gone under. Walt is the brilliant bastard. The brilliant bastard is what inspired the play.

Gateway: Can you talk a little bit about your background?

McKinlay: I hail from the MFA Playwrighting program, thesis pending. After school, I took a sabbatical from theatre for two years, but if



you fall out of the light too long, you stay in the shadows for much longer.

Gateway: Much has been written and said about how Edmonton is no longer the bastion of the infamous "prairie play". There's a distinct trend toward Edmonton plays becoming a little more cosmopolitan. Why do you think this change has come about?

McKinlay: The audience has changed. It's become more metropolitan. It's not going to go see six grain elevator plays a year. They're becoming too sophisticated, too eclectic and more cosmopolitan.

Gateway: What project are you working on now?

McKinlay: My next project is a musical play called *Sleeping Together*. It's tentatively scheduled for the Nexus in April. After that, we'll see bit by bit.



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