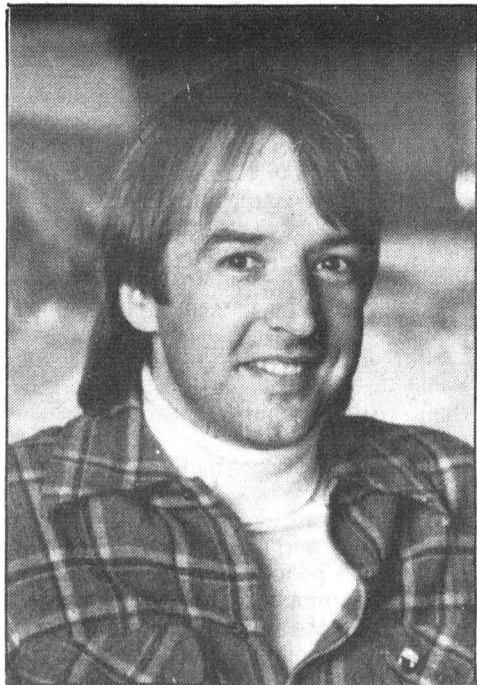


Moving away from prairie themes

Network plans for an urbane season



Stephen Heatley

by Dean Bennett
& Gilbert Bouchard

As far as Theatre Network artistic director Stephen Heatley is concerned, "We've seen the last of the bare-assed prairie play."

Theatre Network, along with most other prairie theatres, is moving from rural to urban themes.

"We've seen the last of it," said Heatley. "People don't want to see it anymore."

"This move is an interesting comment on the prairies. The rural play was the exploration of our roots, and now we've come to the point where we've looked at the roots enough. We're far enough from those roots that we want to investigate ourselves in the present. Our past will be a part of this investigation. Overall, this move shows that we're growing up."

Theatre Network reflects Heatley's assertions as only one of their five plays for the 85-86 season, Ray Storey's *Something in the Wind*, is even remotely rural. Storey's play, though, is hardly your typical prairie piece.

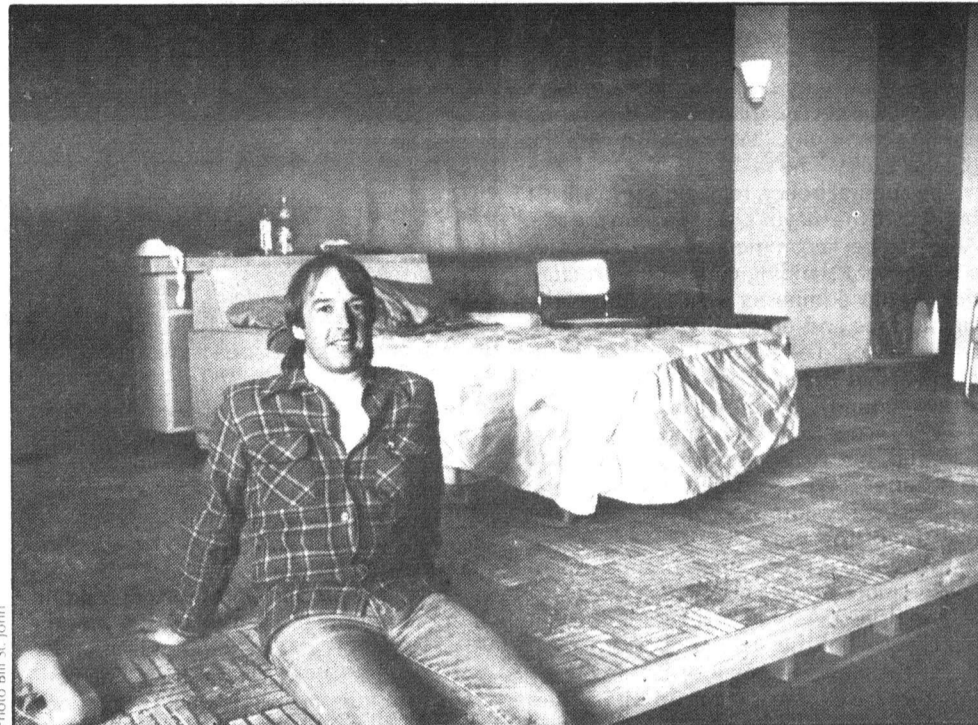
"The play looks at the sour gas issue in Alberta: that tenuous relationship between the environment and big business, and that equally tenuous relationship between us and the multinationals," he said.

Something in the Wind played at Theatre Network in early 1984 under the title *Sick of It* and will tour Alberta later this year.

"The play asks some very tough questions: mainly, would we be willing to give up some luxuries for a clean environment. But these are questions that we're going to have to pose to ourselves," said Heatley.

While the four plays are all by Albertan playwrights, not one is about "Alberta." For example, Michael McKinlay's 1985 Alberta Culture Award winning play *Walt and Roy* deals with the Disney brothers and gives us glimpses of the famous duo the night before they bankrolled their first major project (*Snow White*).

"*Walt and Roy* promises to shed a 'whole new light on Walt Disney,'" said Heatley.



Heatley and the redecorated Theatre Network

"The play is a dark comedy about the relationship between two brothers."

In fact, if any thread runs through the Theatre Network season it would be that of modern urban relationships.

Edmonton playwright Frank Moher's *Odd Jobs*, for example, studies perceptions — both internal and external.

"*Odd Jobs* is a co-production with Catalyst Theatre and looks at how we define ourselves by what we do and how we judge others by what they do for a living," said Heatley. "The play is about a 27 year-old unemployed welder and a 70 year-old math professor who meet and get to know each other as he does odd jobs around her house. It's not a romance; the play looks at how they help each other develop their own self definitions and how he helps her come to grips with her loss of self-definition."

Rose Scollard's *Uneasy Pieces* also looks at relationships but in a different sort of way. Advertised as "bedtime stories your mother never told you," the show, according to Heatley, "is a series of Twilight Zone-like plays." If nothing else, this play promises to be

different.

Undoubtedly, though, the most intriguing play of Theatre Network's season will be their production of *Your Wildest Dreams*.

"It's a musical by Marianne Copithorne and Murray McCune about God forcing Adam and Eve to come back to earth to patch up shaky romances. They fail time after time, so God threatens the world with a second global flood unless they help this last couple — Ted and Fern — get over their problems."

Heatley is proud of his theatre's fall lineup and is propelling Theatre Network forward in other directions as well.

"Activity breeds activity," he said. "One of the directions we're moving is play developments. We want longer time lines so that authors have a better opportunity to nurture and develop their ideas."

Heatley is also improving the theatre's production values. "We're redecorating the theatre inside and out. We want people to know that we're not here part-time. We're here to stay. We're spreading the word that there is theatre in Alberta for Albertans."



Marianne Copithorne, seen at centre, is co-writer of *Your Wildest Dreams*, an upcoming Theatre Network play.

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