

McClure's ego stars

McClure
Theatre Aquanuis Production
Northern Light Presentation
Kaasa Theatre
Run ends December 20

review by Elaine Ostry

As the play *McClure* proves, the life of a hero does not always translate into good drama. Especially when the hero himself is the only character in the play. Dedication, it seems, is best seen through the eyes of others — not told to you by the hard-working soul himself.

The story of Dr. Robert Baird McClure is an interesting one and worthy of theatre, but a one-man play is not the best method for telling it.

The audience is treated to McClure's commentary on his twenty-five years of medical service for a mission in China. The play is an interesting mix of history and theatre; however, the theatre is subsumed by the history. And once you recall your Chinese revolutionary history, boredom sets in.

This boredom is not the fault of Stephen Black, who plays McClure. Black is a talented actor who tackles the role with more energy than it is worth. He makes great use of a

rather dull set. Black also has a fine sense of pace, especially in the middle of the play.

The best aspects of Black's acting are the humorous scenes. One-liners are scattered throughout the play; indeed, the play would be quite funny if it did not feature such great blocks of textbook-style history. Black makes the most of the funny lines when they do appear. He describes the elation of getting engaged: "Head and heart and hormones were all sanctioned in one move."

The funniest scenes are those in which Black recreates dialogues with others. His impression of the lady shocked by his working gear, in the Chinese heat, of an apron over his underwear is memorable.

Unfortunately, the play dips into sentimentality when describing Amy, McClure's wife. Apparently McClure rarely saw her due to the demands of his work, for "when Amy married me, she married Chaos. When she came to China, she came to Chaos." The forced separations from his wife and children serve to show just how dedicated he is. The music does not help this situation, for all he had to do was say "Amy" and cue violins!

Black's energy saves the play from mediocrity. Certainly this energy is necessary for portraying an ego like McClure's. However, listening to someone tell you how much he works is not any more entertaining in the



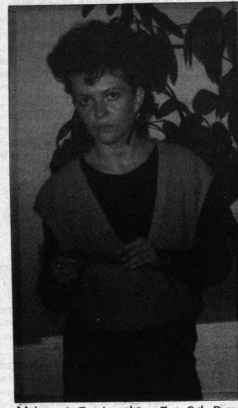
Stephen Black is Dr. McClure in one-man play.

Photo Dragos Ralu

theatre as it is in real life. Much of the play can be thus summarized: "Look how much I've done for this hospital! McClure's egotism may be true to life, but it's still tiresome. (At one point he describes himself as feeling "fired but virtuous.")

The excellence of Black's acting comes close but does not ultimately transcend the

script, which is more of a historical commentary than a play. The faults of *McClure* lie in the form of the one-man play. If there were other actors with whom McClure could interact, the character of the doctor as well as the history of his times would come through more naturally and less forced than in this production.



Malgorzata Zurakowska Photo Cathy Duong

Guest artist from Poland's print exhibit

interview by Cathy Duong

Have you ever had nightmares?

Malgorzata Zurakowska translates the burdens and fears of our world into emotionally and visually provocative prints. For example, one named *Existences* shows a gently flowing mass of cloth that seems to engulf an ominous being underneath it. This entrapped presence is struggling hopelessly beneath this beautiful but spiteful cloth. This image perhaps represents fear and even man's never ending struggles in life.

Another print, *Apokalipse (Crying Angel, 1987)*, shows a dark, swirling vortex. A hint of dying light can be seen at its centre. Swirling round the vortex are flowing, indistinguishable figures. Zurakowska maintains that these images are her conception of the cosmos and arise from her interest in astrology. This print, incidentally, is the latest one to be finished in her lifetime work of forty prints.

The images, which are both beautiful and eerie, can be perceived in all of Zurakowska's prints. Another example is *Apokalipse (Angel of Abyss, 1986)*. Rolling lines and forms are illustrated here, and they compel the viewer

to correlate with the artist's ideas and feelings.

Zurakowska is currently a guest artist at the University of Alberta from Poland. She is also visiting the Society of Northern Alberta Print Artists. She now has an exhibition of eighteen mezzotints created from 1982-87, showing at the Latitude 53 Gallery. The main subject of her prints is influenced by her political language. The apocalypse motif appears in most of the prints. These show chaos and the shattering of the earth.

It is with an extreme perseverance and a tremendous love (Zurakowska emphasizes the word "love") which allows the artist to create these prints. There is a lot of technical work involved; each print takes her from 200-400 hours to prepare the plate. In a year she produces only about three or four plates. This might explain the small scale on which Zurakowska works. She remarks that "with bigger scales you lose all the important details." She describes the long time to create the plates as a "contemplating process" during which she tries to balance her philosophy and world views in her art.

Zurakowska finished her studies of graphic

arts at the Cracow's University of Fine Arts in 1980. She has received a number of prestigious awards for her work: six international and six Polish national prizes.

This artist thrives for perfection in her prints. The turbulences are depicted in a skillfully controlled manner. She is most interested in light, and works mainly with black and white media. She only uses colours for experimentation. The effects of light in her prints are often subtle yet striking, inviting the viewer to search more into the pictures.

Zurakowska enjoys music and philosophy besides art. Her work is somewhat influenced by Rembrandt. Her visit to Edmonton is a unique opportunity for cultural exchange as well as a chance for us to view her compelling works.

Malgorzata Zurakowska will be giving a lecture on December 3 at 5:00 p.m. in Room 220 of the Fine Arts Building. The official opening of her exhibition is on December 4 at 8:00 p.m. This exhibition will run at the Latitude 53 Gallery until December 15.

Fraser: writing with DramaLAB

interview by Elaine Ostry

Brad Fraser talks about his recent work in DramaLAB '87, a workshop for writers, directors and producers interested in TV and film. Fraser is a playwright.

"We explored ideas of how we can use our writing to look on film," Fraser says. The writers were given several exercises to do. One exercise is to create a story in three minutes' worth of film, during which you can tell a whole story if you know what you're doing."

The value of DramaLAB, claims Fraser, is the emphasis on business and technical skills. Several "resource people" have been working with the workshop participants. The writers have also been "practising with pitching ideas at a producer." The project's organizers, says Fraser, have been "very accessible about giving me enough equipment and time" to develop ideas.

DramaLAB is a workshop for experienced professionals. Fraser's experience has been in the theatre. He won the Alberta Culture Playwright's awards in 1978 and 1979 in the "high school and adult categories."

Fraser describes his past plays as "dark, twisted comedies." He has written *Mutants*, which played at the Watterdale, *Wolf Boy*, *Rude Noises*, and *Young Art*. Edmonton

audiences may recall his play *Chainsaw Love*, which was part of the Fringe two years ago. It was about "a group of cannibals who have a vampire come and visit. It was infamous for the amount of gore in it." Fraser claims that with this play he tried to bring a horror film to life in the theatre.

Fraser's latest play *Unidentified Human Remains* will be performed in Toronto next fall. It is actually set in Edmonton. "It's about a group of people in their mid-twenties

"I'm certainly willing to compromise my artistic integrity for that much money."

experiencing love and sex in the '80's — and one of them is a serial killer."

Theatre, Fraser claims, is "too elitist. [It] often is not in touch with the realities of day to day life." It is "over-intellectual."

Film and TV, on the other hand, are "too sensational," says Fraser, "and need more of the thought that stories get in the theatre."

What he is trying to do is to take "popular art and try to take it to the stage, and see if the immediacy of the stage brings it to life." The different forms "can work together."

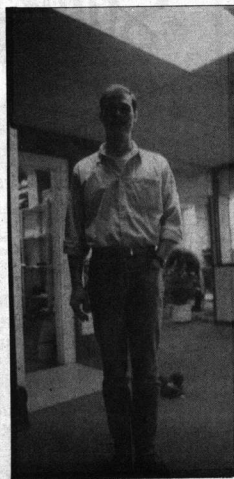
With the DramaLAB program, Fraser is working on material for TV. The workshop group will conceive six TV episodes based on unemployment for the National Film Board during the second part of DramaLAB in Montreal, in February. These episodes will later be filmed.

"TV gives you a certain format," Fraser says, "but that doesn't mean you have to be unimaginative." It does involve a few compromises, though. "Our job is to write — and then you hand it to a producer, who hands it to a director — you kiss it goodbye." The script will likely be rewritten several times.

TV writers are paid a lot, however, which makes up for the loss of creative control. One can earn up to \$9000 for a half-hour episode.

"I'm certainly willing to compromise my artistic integrity for that much money," says Fraser deadpan.

Fraser's plans for the future include three features which are now in varying degrees of development. He recently formed a partnership with Jeffrey Hirschfield (*Geeks in Love*, *Elmo's Rainbow*) for writing for radio and TV. This is to make money "to develop stage things we're really interested in," says Fraser.



Brad Fraser writes "dark, twisted comedies."

Photo Elaine Ostry