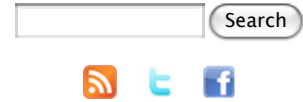


# THE GATEWAY

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## Buddy explores adolescence, masculinity, and rural Albertan culture

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Darrin Hagen's new play takes a hilarious and poignant look at small-town life and friendship

**Beth Storheim, Arts & Entertainment Writer**

### Buddy

Directed by Bradley Moss

Written by Darrin Hagen

Starring Jesse Gervais and Mark Jenkins

5–24 May, Tuesday–Saturday 8pm, Sundays 2pm

The Roxy Theatre (10708–124 St)

\$21–27 at [tixonthesquare.ca](http://tixonthesquare.ca), or call Theatre Network at 780-453-2440



Darrin Hagen's most recent play, *Buddy*, examines friendship and courage in the face of societal rejection during adolescence, when one is very vulnerable, and often powerless. *Buddy* is about the struggle for survival of such pariahs, which in this hostile world, can never be guaranteed.

Hagen, whose previous plays include *The Edmonton Queen* and *The Neo-Nancies: Hitler's Kickline*, has crafted a work that employs a familiar mixture of humour and tragedy, but this time is neither farcical nor wholly autobiographical. However, *Buddy* is loosely based on Darrin Hagen's teenage years, growing up in Rocky Mountain House.

In the play, one man [Jesse Gervais] reminisces about his teenage buddy who has recently died [Mark Jenkins], while searching through his archive of video footage from their time together during one summer in a small town near the Rocky Mountains of Alberta. The stage is framed with video cameras and screens (arranged by media designer Ian Jackson), creating an intimate setting where the audience can see this relationship forming and unfolding before them, as though they were actually present in the action.

*Buddy* is new territory for Jenkins and Gervais. Though the two Edmonton-based actors worked together before in MacGregor's *Hard Ice Cream & Gas* in 2008, it was a piece of cake compared to *Buddy*, whose script was still in development when rehearsals began.

"It's a new work," says Jenkins. "We had to develop our own process [with the audio-visual elements], and then we had to learn how to use that process [...] and now we're getting to that stage that every other production has been in. But leading up to that, it was completely unique. And it was [very different from] MacGregor's, [which was] a more traditional play."

Working with director Bradley Moss and Darrin Hagen (who's also the sound designer for the production) made the process easier, both Gervais and Jenkins say. Though most plays are shaped almost solely by a director, the cast of *Buddy* had the added benefit of having the playwright present for many of the show's rehearsals.

"[Hagen's] great, he's super unbelievably collaborative and very giving, and [...] trusts his performers. It really shows in his writing because [...] he allows us to find our own way within the text. He's also there to tell us what it really means, as well."

And, according to Gervais, Moss has "great instincts [...] He knows when we're doing our job. And he holds us to that. And he doesn't take any bullshit!"

Even with the guidance of both the playwright and a director, a lot of close collaboration took place between Jenkins, Gervais, Moss and Hagen.

"It made me feel comfortable that I could offer what I was thinking about my character, or with anything to do with the production [and] at the very least it would be listened to and evaluated," added Jenkins.

Despite the elements of tragedy, though, Hagen blends a sense of humour into the narrative.

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"It's funny," says Gervais. "So funny, and it's wonderfully touching. It'll be a visual treat! People won't see anything [else] like it on Edmonton stages."

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