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ARTS

Buddy: Candid camera

Darrin Hagen gets inventive with video to tell his story

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A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do—in Darrin Hagen's works, that usually means the guy doing so does it in heels and a dress. They're illustrious drag works, acclaimed in Edmonton and abroad, yet Hagen's upcoming work *Buddy* features nary a single guy in disguise. It's a break from his usual motifs that he's found stimulating to explore.

"It's been thrilling to write a play that has nothing to do with drag," he laughs, a room-filling chuckle. "That's a big deal for me, because ultimately most of my plays have embraced [drag] as performance inspiration or as a content inspiration. But in this one it has nothing to do with it. It was really refreshing to start exploring that part of my life again—that world before the dress got involved."

Instead of focusing on or using drag to tell the story, *Buddy* examines the transition from boyish youth to manhood, and what, exactly, makes a man a man, as two boys make a movie of their last year together in a small town, before graduation and adulthood pull them in separate directions.

Moviemaking isn't just written into the story: it's part of the telling and the play's visuals, as the moments onstage get projected behind the action as it happens. Actors Jessie Gervais and Mark Jenkins, armed with hand cameras, are transmitting live feed during the show onto a screen behind them.

It's cinematic integration dreamt up by Hagen and developed with Bradley Moss, who directs, and further fleshed out through collaboration with cinematographer Ian Jackson and set designer Paul Bezaire.



Earlier this year, they set scripts aside and just workshopped with the cameras, figuring out how to make them do what they wanted: Bezaire ended up inventing a new type of camera stand on wheels, while Jackson had to figure out how to have the cameras transmit wirelessly during the show.

"Usually the writing drags the tech along behind it, and in this case I'd say they both had to step up to the plate repeatedly side by side, over again," Hagen says.

It's an unusual storytelling device; really, these days the term "multimedia" gets pinned to any show that uses a few background projections, but Buddy's aiming to forge an integral link between video and story.

"What I love about this piece is that this isn't a play with some slides behind it, you know?" says Hagen. "This is multimedia [that's] integral to the story, and it actually helps us tell the story, as opposed to an extra gloss of production on top of the story."

Like most of Hagen's work, the recollections of the growing pains between boy and man draw from observations Hagen's made, issues he's exploring and a few dabs of his own life: he had to be a man before he could become a queen, after all, and getting there wasn't without its triumphs and struggles.

"I think people look at me [and go], 'Oh, Darrin's a drag queen,'" Hagen says. "Well dude, that drag queen was created by a man, and that man had a life before he became a drag queen, and ultimately even though I grew up gay in a small town, I was a girlie boy, I still had male friends, I lived in a masculine world, a male-dominated world. I had to learn how to negotiate that, and ultimately the characters in this play have to learn to negotiate that, too." ▼

Thu, May 7 – Sun, May 24

Buddy

Written by Darrin Hagen

Directed by Bradley Moss

Starring Jessie Gervais, Mark Jenkins

The Roxy (10708 - 124 st), \$21 – \$27

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