

COVER / MARK McQUOWN

Theater is a 'Sirius' matter for Boulder playwright

By KATHRYN BERNHEIMER
Camera Film and Theater Critic

A few months ago, Mark McQuown decided it was time to get serious.

An actor, director and playwright, McQuown has spent much of the last 11 years bobbing back and forth between Boulder and New York City. These lengthy pilgrimages to the nation's theatrical mecca are now over. It took a long time for McQuown to get over the prevailing notion that the only real theater, the only theater worth anything, was happening on stages in the Big Apple.

"That's just an illusion," McQuown now says, "and you have to get past it in the theater world." Determined to "do it here," the former CU acting teacher recently founded Sirius Theatre.

When McQuown received a \$1,000 Neodada grant, he called James Maxwell, with whom he had worked on the Actors Ensemble production of "The Real Inspector Hound." (McQuown directed, Maxwell, the company's founder, produced.)

"Sirius Theatre was formed with the idea of finding another person to handle the administrative end. We were a great team — he's really good on the house end out (house management, publicity, etc.), and lets me handle the artistic end. So I asked if he wanted to co-produce 'P.J.'"

"P.J." was written by McQuown in New York in 1984, during what he calls a pretty depressing period. The play was produced locally that year as the winner of the Colorado Playwrights Festival in Littleton, and earned rare reviews.

Tonight, Maxwell's new venue, the Colorado Theatre Festival, will present the revival of "P.J." in conjunction with Sirius Theatre. The Colorado Theatre Festival will also present Marty Durkin's "Beyond the Pale" July 22-Aug. 6.



LET'S GET SERIOUS: Mark McQuown, founder of Sirius Theatre, is directing his own play, "P.J.," a drama pitting Western medicine against Eastern health that stars Elmer Armstrong and Bill Kramer. It is one of several projects currently on McQuown's drawing board.



London Lewis

In August, Sirius Theatre and the Nomad Players will co-produce "String Game," a play co-written by McQuown and CU English professor Kay Cook. The two are long-time friends and former Gold Hill neighbors. Cook approached McQuown three years ago with a narrative to be dramatized. McQuown turned the story into a play, and then to

gether they collaborated on the final draft. "String Game," which opens at the Nomad Playhouse Aug. 25, is a semi-autobiographical drama about a 12-year-old girl living with her 80-year-old grandmother. McQuown will direct.

McQuown is also directing "P.J.," which was directed by Margaret Mancinelli four years ago.

"We used to sit and negotiate," McQuown says of that experience. "I don't negotiate with myself, so this time the process is different. But as a director, I subjugate myself as the playwright. I treat the play as if I were directing someone else's play. The only difference is that I don't have to call anyone up when I want to get rid of three pages."

The playwright describes "P.J." as a miracle play. By that he means it is about a man who performs a miracle. "On a lower station, it pits Western medicine against the mystical," he adds.

"When I wrote it I wasn't having a great time," McQuown explains. "My mental frame of reference was bad, I was hanging out with people on a very definitive spiritual journey. People tend

to put God in a box, because if you can define it you can keep it around for your use. But to me, it's an indefinable entity, and you can't put boundary lines around it. I wanted to conceptualize that thought, P.J. says he's acting through the God spirit. But you go out of the theater with a lot of ways of looking at it. Is he nuts or on a spiritual journey? Does he accomplish what he says or does he just think he accomplishes it?"

The future of Sirius Theatre largely depends on the financial success of "P.J." and "String Game." McQuown is indeed serious about making theater in Boulder, but he has to find a way to support himself while doing it.

"The theater audience here is still growing. It's five times what it was when I came here 11 years ago. But for some reason, theater is still on a hit and miss level in Boulder. I'm convinced that one of the things that has to happen is for directors to start getting paid. It's the director, not the company, that tells me whether a play is worth leaving the house to see."

"P.J." will be presented at the Guild Theatre, 4840 Stirling Drive in Boulder, June 3-25. Tickets are \$7.50. For reservations, call 443-3866.

"P.J." designer to exhibit art with show

Mark McQuown's Boulder debut monodrama "P.J." will be the centerpiece of the Guild Theatre during the run of his play in New York and Chicago. He has designed the set for "P.J." and the show will include both old and new work. Of his recent work he says, "I'm real proud of it. It's a mix of old and new work, and I've worked for years and years in the design department at the University of Colorado. I've done a lot of work in the design department and I've done a lot of work in the design department and I've done a lot of work in the design department."

—REED GLENN