

Playwright's wife responsible for returning 'P.J.' to original

Playwright Mark McQuown took one night to write "P.J." and four years to revise it. But the final product, which opens Thursday as part of the Colorado Theater Festival in Boulder, isn't all that different from the first draft.

"P.J." was first produced in 1984 as part of the Colorado Playwrights Festival in Littleton. The show won rave reviews, and in the flush of his local success McQuown headed to New York. A producer bought the script for an off-Broadway production and encouraged the playwright to make major revisions.

But the production never materialized, and in early 1985, McQuown returned to Colorado with "what I thought was an amazing script. Then my wife read it," said the playwright. "When she finished, she stood up, threw the script at me and said, 'You've ruined the play!'"

"P.J." is about a doctor whose principles are shaken when he meets a schizophrenic patient who claims to hear voices from God. Like "Agnes of God," the play is about the conflict between faith and reason, and McQuown says his New York revisions moved the script too far on the side of reason.

In the wake of his wife's critique, McQuown threw out his revisions and returned to the original script. "I developed some of the characters," streamlined the plot and honed in on the theme of medicine vs. mysticism," he said. "But the result is much closer to what audiences saw in Littleton."

If the show is a hit in Boulder, will McQuown try once more to take it to New York? "Frankly, I don't care what happens to this play after we do it," said the exasperated playwright.

"P.J." opens Thursday at the Guild Theater in Boulder and plays Wednesdays through Sundays through June 25. Call 443-2866 for tickets.



Alan Stern

"Music" in October, but it depends on whether director Harold Prince is willing to share the Auditorium Theater with the National Society of Geologists, which has booked the theater for three

days during the musical's scheduled run.

One show Garner turned down is "Driving Miss Daisy," starring Julie Harris and Brock Peters, because he felt the 2,200-seat Auditorium Theater is too large for this intimate, three-character play.

Although the Denver Center Theater Company announced its own production of "Miss Daisy" for the 1988-89 season, publicist Ken Novice says the company is still negotiating for the rights. Even if the touring production skips Denver, the play's licensing agent may decide to bar local companies from staging it.

By the way, the 1987-88 "Best of Broadway" season concludes with

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THEATER

Stage festival added to Boulder's summer

By Alan Stern

Denver Post Drama Critic

James Maxwell forms theater companies the way other people form opinions. Over the past year or so, the producer has spawned the Actors Ensemble in Boulder, the Directors' Theater in Lafayette and a writing workshop called Playwrights.

Last week, the compulsive impresario announced the formation of a new venture: The Colorado Theater Festival. The event, scheduled to take place in Boulder this summer, will feature productions of "P.J." by Mark McQuown and "Beyond the Pale," a new musical by Marty Durlin.



Alan Stern

"P.J.," a psychological drama, was first produced in 1984 at the Colorado Playwrights Festival in Littleton. "The show was very well received, but it hasn't been produced anywhere since," said Maxwell. "I felt it was time to give the play another viewing." The production, which McQuown will direct, opens June 3 at the Guild Theater in Boulder.

"Beyond the Pale," a musical about life in a senior-citizens center, will open July 22 at the Nomad Playhouse. Playwright Richard Sharp ("Dracula") will direct; call him at 388-5708 for audition information.

Maxwell decided to form the Colorado Theater Festival after he heard that McQuown and Durlin had received grants for productions of their work. "I thought it might be a good idea to present both shows under one roof," he said. The producer expects the festival to become an annual event, presenting world premieres of American and British plays.

In the meantime, does he plan to form any more theater companies soon?

"Oh, I have about half a dozen companies that I'd like to start," he answered. "I'm just waiting for the right moment."

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