

DES McANUFF

A Life in Stages

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BILLY CRYSTAL, PETE TOWNSHEND AND CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER HAIL STRATFORD SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND *JERSEY BOYS* HELMER DES McANUFF FOR REMARKABLE THEATRICAL CAREER

New Ballinran Documentary *Des McAnuff: A Life in Stages* Airs on Bravo!_ Feb. 7 at 8 p.m. ET; Feb. 12 at 7 p.m. as part of Great Canadian Biographies

(TORONTO, January 11, 2010) – Comedian and actor Billy Crystal calls Des McAnuff one of the most versatile figures in theatre today – someone who brings something different to everything he does, from Shakespeare to *Tommy* to Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. The Who's front man Pete Townshend says McAnuff could have been anything he wanted to be – a guitarist, a songwriter, an actor or designer. Des McAnuff chose the theatre, and his illustrious career and remarkable life are the subjects of the new documentary, ***Des McAnuff: A Life in Stages*, airing Sunday, February 7 at 8 p.m. ET and Friday, February 12 at 7 p.m. on Bravo!**

Crystal, Townshend, Christopher Plummer and other entertainment celebrities are featured in the one-hour tribute to the two-time Tony and Olivier award-winning director of such smash hits as *Jersey Boys*, *The Who's Tommy* and *Billy Crystal's 700 Sundays*. In 2008, McAnuff took on the role of Artistic Director of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival after more than a decade at the helm of the La Jolla Playhouse in California, which he transformed into one of the leading theatres in North America.

Documentary filmmakers Craig Thompson (Producer) and Michael Savoie (Director) spent almost a year following McAnuff on a whirlwind schedule around the world that included the opening of *Jersey Boys* in Melbourne, Australia, directing two plays and overseeing the 2009 season at the Stratford Festival, and working on new projects in the U.K. and on Broadway.

Although he is best known as a theatre director, Des McAnuff is also an accomplished writer and musician who got his start in the business writing plays and composing scores for productions in Toronto's theatre scene in the 1970s, including Michael Ondaatje's "*Collected Works of Billy the Kid*".

"I love writing songs and playing music," says McAnuff. "Playing with great musicians is like working with great actors and driving a rock and roll band is relatively similar to directing. You have the respect and understanding for the people you are working with."

It was McAnuff's abilities as a guitarist and songwriter that forged his friendship with Pete Townshend and their eventual collaboration on the Tony Award-winning production of *The Who's Tommy*.

"I don't think I ever realized how much of a guitar player and songwriter that Des had been," says Townshend in the documentary. "In a sense, he took a slight deflection when he came out of high school where he'd been in a band and had been very creative. He could have been an actor, film director, a designer or a musician. He could have done any of those things as career, and I think he's found something that encompasses them all."

The film also explores McAnuff's personal life and how the loss of his father in a tragic accident just before he was born shaped his early years and influenced his career. Raised in

Scarborough, Ontario, McAnuff discovered his passion for music, theatre and performing while attending Woburn Collegiate. . . .2/

He left for New York at the age of 24 and quickly became the darling of the city's theatre scene, directing an eclectic mix of productions from the rarely produced Polish play *The Crazy Locomotive* to Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I* for the New York Shakespeare Festival at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park.

In 1983, he was invited to California to revive the dormant La Jolla Playhouse, transforming it with an eclectic mix of Shakespeare, the classics and contemporary works. La Jolla was also the staging ground for musical hits such as *Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; *The Who's Tommy*, *Billy Crystal's 700 Sundays* and *Jersey Boys*.

Says Billy Crystal, McAnuff's friend and collaborator on *700 Sundays*: "Des finds an interesting way to challenge himself and the audience into a new experience for something they might have a pre-conditioned response to. Oh, it's going to be that. And you get something you never expected."

McAnuff himself admits he has been lucky in his career, "but luck only gets you the first job. You have to earn the second and third jobs. Directing is a skill and I think I've developed my craft."

In 2010, McAnuff will direct Christopher Plummer in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. Says Plummer, who worked with McAnuff on the 2008 production of *Caesar and Cleopatra*: "Des is always doing things that drive theatres of this caliber into the 21st century."

Des McAnuff: A Life in Stages is produced by Ballinran Productions, whose previous credits include *Death or Canada*, which was nominated in 2009 for 4 Gemini Awards and an Irish Academy Award and *Hangman's Graveyard*, which aired late last year, both for History Television. More information about Ballinran is available at www.ballinran.com.

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