

THEATER

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MUSICALS

Growing pains provide humor for 'Love'

Theater review

"MCMANUS IN LOVE" by Patrick F. McManus. Directed by Jack Delehanty. At Taproot Theatre, tonight through Sunday. 781-9707.

BY RICHARD FARR
Special to *The Seattle Times*

Your first date almost never happens because you stammer too violently for your romantic overtures to be understood. The object of your infatuation has to ask you out instead — and you show up at the movie with your fly undone.

Familiar territory so far? But if you are the pre-adolescent Patrick McManus, these are just the first few bars in "McManus in Love," a hilarious little symphony of a one-man show about the wonderful awfulness of growing up. Spokane author McManus wrote the piece for touring actor Tim Behrens, who is performing it at Taproot Theatre under Jack Delehanty's direction.

Growing pains are a well-worn theme in comedy routines, and this script relies on some hackneyed particulars, too — fear of the dark, the hated sister ("The Troll"), getting your tie caught in your fly. But McManus does it with complete freshness, and integrates it seamlessly with much zanier material.

In McManus-land that first date ends when our hero accidentally bites the neck of the beautiful Melba Peachbottom in a crowded movie theater — during "Dracula."



RICK SINGER

Tim Behrens stars in "McManus in Love," a one-man show written by Patrick McManus.

The ensuing pandemonium is evoked with such vivid lushness that a recent full-house Taproot audience, already moved to tears of laughter, were reduced to banging their heads on their knees in a rictus of paralyzed delight.

Much of the credit goes to the performance of Behrens. Chameleon-like, he can be the author at 10, 6 or 2 — even, briefly *in utero* — with a deft feel for the physical expression of childhood's loose-

jointed awkwardness.

If there's a fault, it's that too often he picks up a punch line and digs us in the ribs with it. A different actor might have given the unexpected jokes even more power by letting them fall more softly. But the material carries itself. And Behrens comes into his own with the more manic, physical elements of the comedy, loping around on the spare, deliberately shabby set like a caged and confused animal.

Many earlier McManus characters are here to delight again: Crazy Eddie and his curmudgeonly grandma Goombah; Rancid Crabtree, who gives off green steam in contact with water; cousin Buck, to whom Pat really shouldn't have gone for advice about sex because Buck is "just a bit smarter than celery."

McManus fans will not be disappointed by this show, and after seeing it many people may join their club.