

MacNeil: Saying his son was gay was "the only way to cut through the crap."



PLAY, ACTING: Ian Daldry, MacNeil Sr. and Jr.; Inspector's cast (inset).

Theater

Family Theater

MET Stephen Daldry and Ian MacNeil, the hot gay couple from London who have created a stir on Broadway with their revival of J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*. Both in their mid 30s, the two men have reached the top of their professions with dizzying speed and a chorus of critical acclaim. Daldry, whom a London newspaper recently described as "the most charismatic and talented director in the theater today," has won three Olivier awards in a row, and is the head of the Royal Court Theatre, London's eminent home for new writing. Designer MacNeil, whose award-winning sets knock the socks off theatergoers, is the son of Robert MacNeil, co-anchor of PBS's *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*.

Whatever you think of his work, a Stephen Daldry production is never conventional. In Daldry and MacNeil's innovative hands, the Priestley play, a morality-tale-cum-thriller that's long been considered an old warhorse, is literally yanked out of its drawing room

setting and vividly played out on a surrealistic landscape.

From the start of his stewardship of the Royal Court, Daldry opted for a high-risk approach. He programmed two controversial productions with strong gay content, including *MSM*, a dance/theater piece about men who have sex in public toilets. "There is a creative impulse within the London gay community which one has to pursue," he says. MacNeil comments, "We have got something to talk about because we all have this issue raging around inside us; it has got an edge which is potentially interesting."

Many gay men relish the opportunity to create their own worlds because "the real world is organized as though we don't exist," MacNeil offers. In the theater, however, "the curtain goes up and you are *in* somewhere," he continues. "It has its own logic and imagination and its own spirituality."

The couple, who have been lovers for five years, also flourish in the world outside. Jumping at the opportunity to show they are the gay family of the '90s, MacNeil invited his celebrity fa-

ther to be interviewed along with them. Robert MacNeil sounds like the perfect spokesman for Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG) when he talks admiringly of his son and his son-in-law's achievements in the theater, although he insists that he is not "a proselytizer or an advocate in public." MacNeil did, however, bring up the subject at a conference of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists' Association in response to criticisms of *MacNeil/Lehrer's* coverage of AIDS and gay issues. Mentioning his son was gay was "the only way to cut through the crap," he explains.

Daldry, MacNeil, and MacNeil Sr. do create the impression they are a happy unit.

"I feel very strongly connected to the MacNeil family and I have always felt unbelievably welcome; it is a very reassuring feeling," says Daldry. MacNeil Sr. seems to have one reservation, however. "You are not going to have any children, you two," he notes, somewhat regretfully, beaming at the couple, radiating paternal pride. His son quickly responds, "But that does not mean I cannot raise a child."

Daldry and MacNeil are much too busy right now to extend their family. Plans are afoot to clone *Inspector* around the globe, starting with a production this fall in Japan, and later in the year they hope to do a show together at the Royal Court. MacNeil will also design the sets for a London stage adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, scheduled for September.

"You get to a stage when you ask, When am I going to stop doing all this theater stuff and have a life? We talk often about making a decision to stop working in this way and buying that house and having those kids," Ian MacNeil says. But he adds, "This is a pretty rich life, and the only way you can do this is to let it be all-consuming; that's a choice you make."—GERARD RAYMOND



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