

# feature

Oregon to L.A.

## McKennon follows road to creativity

By J. Dana Haynes  
Of the Print

Dallas McKennon has been speaking to the Fundamentals of Acting class this week, and while you probably have never met him, chances are you've heard him often.

Dallas McKennon's voice has been heard in the Walt Disney productions of "Lady and the Tramp," "101 Dalmations," "Mary Poppins," and "Bednohs and Broomsticks," to name a few. And if you've ever been to Disneyland or Disney World, you've heard his voice echo through Thunder Mountain, chill you in the Haunted Mansion, laugh along with the Pirates of the Carribean, and sing with the Country Bear Jamboree.

Dallas McKennon is a voice man, and he's one of the best in the business.

"I've been in Hollywood for 26 years, and I've done everything possible to keep in tune with my industry," McKennon said. "Those who are sincerely interested in theater have to lock themselves on course and not let anything get in their way." This is his basic message to young people, McKennon remarked.

"The problem is, people go to LA and say 'I'm going to be an actor and if they want me they can call me.' That's nuts," McKennon explained. "There are so many facets of the industry. A person can get into audio, lighting, video, etc. I did sound for some studios, and even entertained at kiddy parties."

Born in La Grande, Oregon, McKennon majored in theater at the University of Washington and returned to live in Portland. He got his start in the entertainment industry at KGW radio, doing a children's show called "Mr. Buttons."

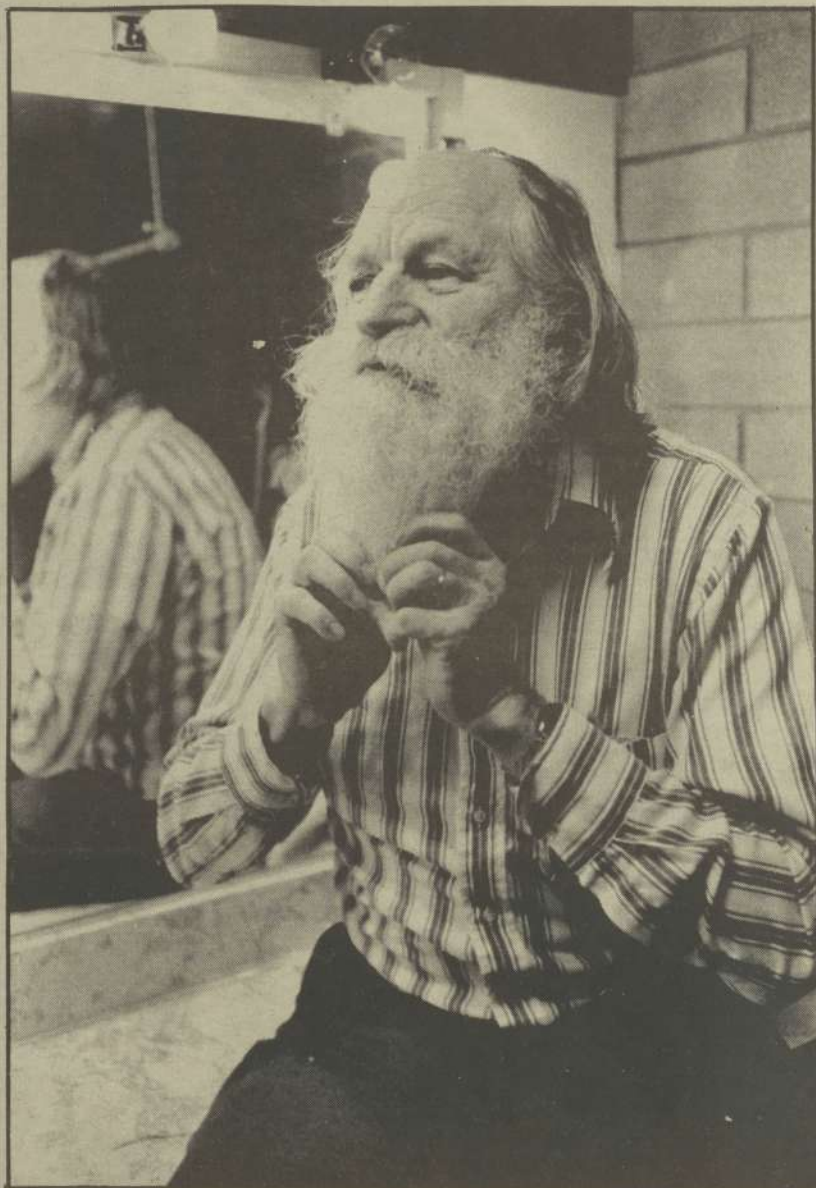
From there, he got a role in a Jimmy Stewart western, "Bend of the River." Producer Aaron Rosenburg liked what he did and invited him to go to Los Angeles. There, he got another Children's radio show for CBS, "Captain Jet."

McKennon then went on to do voices for most of the animation "houses" in Hollywood, including Disney Studios, Warner Bros. and Walter Lantz, creator of Woody Woodpecker.

"Gracy Lantz, Walter's wife, did the voice of Woody and, at one time or another, I did everyone else," McKennon said. He ended up working with the Lantz studios for 19 years.

Another aspect of his career centered on the Disney Studios. McKennon got an on-camera role in Disney's "Son of Flubber." It was a small role, and McKennon was not sure how he was chosen for it.

"I was standing off-stage one day," he explained, "and this voice from behind me said, 'I just wanted to see if you could do anything besides dog barks.' I turned around, and it was Walt Disney."



Photos by David J. Hayden

Disney then invited McKennon to his office, and showed him the plans for an amusement park that he would call Disneyland. "He also told me about a show he was producing, and he wanted me to host it," McKennon said. "It was the Mickey Mouse Club. Unfortunately, I was working with CBS and couldn't get free."

Year's later, McKennon said he saw Disney sitting on the lawn of his office, placidly staring at his studio across the street. The next day, Walt Disney died.

With more than a quarter century of experience, McKennon is now teaching a course on how to use one's voice. He offers the class to actors, teachers, speakers and anyone else interested in learning how to "...change your voice and maintain character," McKennon explained.

"The class is designed to help people come out of their shells. Also, how to find the mechanics in your voice and control them for fun and profit," he said. He has offered the class in Chicago, Kansas City and LA, as well as in Portland and Astoria.

"I'm excited about working with the younger students," McKennon said. "I love to work with kids of any age."

Children have changed in the years he has been entertaining them, McKennon said. "Kids don't want story telling, they want action, and scary stories. Also, kids are more sophisticated," he said. "You have to go along with the 'in' thing or they're not interested."

Still, with all the endeavors on McKennon's list, the animation/voice business still holds his interest. He talks fondly of the men who pioneered the field: Walter Lantz, who created Woody Woodpecker; "It doesn't take much to know how to draw. But it's a real talent to know how to do the elements that make good animation; what looks good, what is attractive. Walter Lantz had that."

