



● The doll that steals the show in *Curtains*

'Jonathan Stryker's' *Curtains*

On some secondary level, *Curtains* seems to have been conceived as a showcase for rising Toronto actresses. The premise – six actresses are invited to the home of feared director Jonathan Stryker (the same name as on *Curtains'* director's credit – more of that anon) to audition for the plum role of mad Audra and are stalked by a mad killer – is full of opportunities for love scenes, death scenes, scenes of bitterness, bitchiness, rage, compassion, triumph, almost anything you can think of. What we get instead are stalk-and-slash scenes, scenes of Stryker 'auditioning' and 'directing' and material that looks like it came from a different movie.

Of course, stalk-and-slash is what *Curtains* is mainly about: the masked (solely to hide from the audience) killer and the isolated bitsy. It's at best a thin sub-genre, but here the murders are so trite in conception (hands emerge to clutch and cut from behind the tree where she's paused in her flight) and so blandly genteel in shooting and cutting that we're denied what pleasures of suspense and splashy axe-in-the-eyeball effects the genre does have to offer.

Dramatically, *Curtains* focusses on Stryker's ludicrous directing methods, which consist of pointlessly angry and condescending harangues, insults and humiliations (a believable character this is not) and the actress' responses which, under the circumstances are not surprisingly limited to becoming tense and defensive, tense and weepy, tense and angry, etc. On top of this, the whole thing is so badly written that it's astounding the performers managed to make anything at all of their roles.

But some did. Lynne Griffith did such a good job defining the compulsively funny, insecure stand-up comic that one suspects she wrote her own lines. Samantha Eggar and Linda Thorson both turned in decent jobs without straining their professional capabilities and, in the latter case, without the benefit of any big scenes to help her along. The rest – Anne Ditchburn, Lesleh Donaldson, Sandee Currie, Sandra Warren and Deborah Burgess – who knows? They weren't on screen long enough for

me to be certain they're all in the final print, let alone long enough to develop characters.

Which brings us to that material from another movie. There was an earlier version of *Curtains*; people who crewed on it say the movie went through a year of production, through major rewrites and reshooting. What's left, for certain, from that earlier version, is about a dozen shots involving a two-foot doll with a subtly horrifying face of sorrow and resentment. Whoever created that doll should be applauded, as should the crew, who managed to make the movie look consistent and fairly good (despite a couple of badly-lit exteriors and Stryker's woefully underfurnished house) under what must have been very trying circumstances.

As noted, Jonathan Stryker is the name on the director's credit, but a sheet in the press kit (possibly left in by mistake) claims this was cameraman Richard Ciupka's directorial debut, while word from the crew says that Peter Simpson directed at least some of the reshoot. The press kit says that Simpson, with writer Robert Guza, Jr., also originated the idea. They thought it up while jogging around Queen's Park.

Peter R. Simpson is the president of Simcom Ltd., a company more noted for making good deals than good movies (*Prom Night* is theirs). It's not likely Simcom will be making any good deals with *Curtains*, but hopefully it will feel that the loss of potential profit is more than offset by the valuable lessons learned by its president in the actual making of a film. On the nature of those lessons, we will not speculate.

Andrew Dowler ●

CURTAINS d. Jonathan Stryker **exec. p.** Richard Simpson **p.** Peter R. Simpson **ed.** Michael Maclaverty **cfe. p. des.** Roy Forge Smith **mus.** Paul Zaza **d.o.p.** Robert Paynter **bsc. add. photog.** Fred Guthe **p. man.** Gerry Arbeid **sc.** Robert Guza, Jr. **(1st team) p. coord.** Gaille Ledrew **p. acct.** Robert Duckworth **asst. p. acct.** Roma Panczyszyn **asst. p. man.** Phillipa Polskin **p. asst.** Carlo Squassero **unit pub.** Linda Moyle **1st a.d.** Tony Thatcher **2nd a.d.** Karen Pike **3rd a.d.** John Pace **cam. op.** Fred Guthe **cam. tech.** Paul Neilsen **clapper loader** Yves Drapeau **cam. trainee** Curtis Brown **sd. mixers** Doug Ganton, Thomas Hilderley **boom** John Thomson **gaffer** John Berrie **best boy** Richard Allen **elect.** Steve Danyluk, Jerome McCann **key grip** Norm Smith **grips** Michael O'Connor, Brian Danniels, Sean Ryerson **gen. op.** Greg Daniels **ward. mist.** Mary Jane McCarty **asst. ward.** Mary Ann Wilson, Brittany Burr, Constance-Buck, Gaye Gardiner **make-up** Sonagh Jabour **asst. make-up** Christine Hart **hair** Jenny Arbour **asst. hair** Maureen Mestan **asst. art. d.** Barbara Matis **2nd asst.**

art. d. Birgit Siber, Suzanne Smith, Debra Gjendem, Brendan Smith **key set dec.** Carol Lavoie **1st asst. set dec.** Linda McClelland **2nd asst. set dec.** Paul Dreskin **set dec. trainee** Marlene Puritt **props buyer** Barry Kemp **prospmaster** Anthony Greco **asst. props** Gordon Sim **const. man.** Bill Harman **hd painter** Nick Kosonic **prosthetics** Greg Cannom **asst. prosthetics** Jeffrey Kinney **prosth. trainee** Linda Preston **sp. efx.** Colin Chilvers **loc. man.** Ray Elias/Brian Ross **cont.** Pauline Harlow **set. photog.** John Williamson **stills** Pat Harbron **asst. stills** Dave Hill **trans. capt.** Michael Curran **asst. trans. capt.** Gof Martin **drivers** Al Kosonic, John Ciccone, Simon Clery, Rick Moyle, Gordon Thorne, **crafts.** James Tamblyn **(2nd team) p. man.** Ilana Frank **unit man.** Helga Stephenson **loc. man.** Fran Solomon **p. coord.** Susan Mander **p. assts.** Carl Marks-George, Diane Mitchell **1st a.d.** Stephen Wright **2nd a.d.** Donato Baldassarra **3rd a.d.** Jerome McCann **gen. asst. to d.** Brock Simpson **cam. op.** Fred Guthe, Robert New scs, Marvin Midwicki **dlapper loader** Christopher Bonniere **focus puller** Greg Farrow **cam. trainee** Ray Bronstein **sd. rec.** Bryan Day **boom** John Thomson **sd. mixers** Joe Grimaldi, David Appleby **1st asst. ed.** Jeremy Maclarverty **2nd asst. ed.** Haydn Streeter **ed. trainee** Laurie Russwurm **sd. ed.** Peter Burgess, Charlie Bowers, Jeremy Maclarverty, Terry Burke **asst. sd. ed.** Michele Cook, Gary DaPrato **mus. con.** Carl Zittler **gaffer** Roger Bate **best boy** Adam Swica **elect.** Ira Cohen, Sandy Carroll, Al Lalonde **key grip** Carlo Campana **2nd grip** Christopher Dean **3rd grip** Greg Palermo **grip** Dennis Thompson **gen. op.** Jock Brandis **ward. mist.** Mary Jane McCarty **asst. ward.** Maureen Gurney **make-up** Shonagh Jabour **asst. make-up** Suzanne Benoit **hair** Jenny Arbour **set dec.** Linda McClelland **1st asst. set dec.** Greg Pelchat **2nd asst. set dec.** Brendan Smith **props** Ed Hanna **stunt coord.** Bob Hannah **const. man.** Bill Harman **cont.** Pauline Harlow **trans. capt.** Michael Curran **drivers** David Chud, Allen Kosonic, Dave Brown, Jerome McCann **crafts.** Laurie Manoim **asst. crafts.** Daria Stermac **cast.** Karnick Armstrong, Liz Ramos **lp.** John Vernon, Samantha Eggar, Linda Thorson, Anne Ditchburn, Lynne Griffin, Sandra Warren, Lesleh Donaldson, Deborah Burgess, Michael Wincott, Mury Chaykin, Joann McIntyre, Calvin Butler, Kate Lynch, Booth Savage, William Marshall, James Kidnie, Jeremy Jensen, Donald Adams, Diane Godwin, Janelle Hutchison, Virginia Light, Kay Griffin, Bunty Webb, Daisy White, Vivian Reis, Sheila Currie, Frances Gunn, Katya Ladan, Suzanne Russell, Jenna Louise, Anna Migliarese, Elaine Crosley, Mary Durkin, Angela Carrol, Julie Massie, Pat Carroll Brown, Teresa Tova, Janice Nicholson, Alison Lawrence, JoAnne Hannah **p.c.** Simcom Ltd. **dist.** (Cdn.) Norstar, (U.S.) Jensen Farley **running time:** 90 mins.

Edward Mowbray & Ruth Taylor's *Not Dead Yet*

This honest piece of anthropological and cultural research had its world premiere at the recent New Media Festival in Toronto. *Not Dead Yet* reveals, for the first time, a portrait of an important sub-cultural movement – punk. Traditionally left to marginalization by the rest of the mass-media, considered freakish, camp or anti-social by the middle class, victimized by moralistic portrayals of punklife on television soma-shows, directors Edward Mowbray and Ruth Taylor have here fashioned a very sympathetic and energetic document. The work features the music and thought of twelve Toronto area punk bands, their members, friends and supporters of the movement that they represent. *Not Dead Yet* breathes authenticity because it is born out of, and respects the community that it portrays. In fact the producers and creators were very conscious of consulting all the people in the tape and made sure that they would approve of its conception and evolution throughout the year-and-a-half that it took to put it together. It is a model for all documentarians, aided by the fact that Ruth Taylor is herself, a member of United State, one of the groups featured in the tape.

Co-director Edward Mowbray, had a brief career in television before turning to independent video production. His video art has toured North America and Europe.

Executive producer Tom Taylor, has had a long career as an illustrator, editor

● *Not Dead Yet* holds up a mirror to our own ugliness



and filmmaker and Christopher Lowry, the other executive producer, produced the award-winning *Chambers: Tracks and Gestures* with Atlantis, while Alan Collins, was the inspiration and seed for the production of *Not Dead Yet*. Originally conceived as a shorter work, *Not Dead Yet* grew into this full-blown, full-blooded celebration of freedom of expression in the year of Big Brother Ronald Reagan, the world's oldest video artist.

I have to admit that I attended the premiere screening with more than a little apprehension. Oh, it wasn't the chains and leather and spiked purple hair that frightened me, although the hair did tend to obscure the viewing from time to time. (The placing of 12 monitors around the round room of Ontario Place's Trillium Pod, level fifty, solved sight problems.) Nor was it the fact that I thought that the sound track would destroy my geriatric audio system. (I'm used to it and the soundtrack was uniformly and universally excellent.) I was frightened of seeing another one of those sloppy rip-off punk films, badly produced, terrible sound, an excuse for selling records for just another corporate recordband.

What I found was a somewhat conventional documentary. Informative. Sympathetic. And very accessible to a general audience. In essence, an act of communication committed to videotape. The programme was beautifully shot by a team of videographers led by Mowbray in 3/4" and then pumped up to 1". Considering the claustrophobia of the two bars where the performances were recorded, the videography gives space and tension to the music.

The real virtuosity though, comes from the montage, structure and assembly. The five months spent in post-production seem to have led to a flowing and intelligent edit. Parts of performances of each of the bands are imperceptibly interwoven with interviews with members of the punk community. These are interlinked and arranged by a commonality of theme... violence, image, conformity, the media, sexuality, politics, nuclearism, lifestyle, survival and above all, the impact of the music. The whole package is heightened to a level of analytical artistry by the use of super slow-motion and a complex overlaying of the soundscape. All of this works on a visceral and intellectual moment-for-the-moment experience which expresses and reflects the subject in the only way that would be honest. It is as close to the real as you can get without getting slammed.

But, above all, *Not Dead Yet* is a political work. It offers an alternate vision. It allows for the message to surface without letting the message become superficial. It uses no narrative device. It lets people speak for themselves. It provides a context but no artificial overview, comment and analysis. This comes later, after the show.

The message of the punk community is one of universal hope. It is an international movement. Mowbray told me that you can go to any small town anywhere in the world and find one or two punks standing defiantly on the corners of main street. They are there to remind us about tolerance. About conformity. About our own once-ideal youth. About lost energy. Entropy. About copping out. Selling out. Hypocrisy. Injustice. Mediocrity. Boredom. Unemployment. About naive tragedy. About the death of our society. About the sense of community. Belonging.

The punk movement acts as our signpost. They exist as expressive humanists, concerned about life, civil liberty and the pursuit of happiness through the pursuit of their art-form - their music. They hold a mirror to our own ugliness. It is not they who are ugly or freakish. It is we.

Peter Wintonick ●

NOT DEAD YET d. Edward Mowbray & Ruth Taylor **exec. p.** Tom Taylor, Christopher Lowry **assoc. p.** Alan Collins **based on an idea by** Ruth Taylor & Collins **chief videography/ed.** Mowbray **p.c.** Victory Video Arts **videotape**, 1984 **running time**: 60 min. **dist.** available for broadcast and videocassette **l.p.** Toronto area punk performers and bands Chronic Submission, United State, BFG (Bunch of Fucking Goofs), Jolly Tambourine Man, Blibber, The Rat Crushers, Direct Action and more.

Giles Walker & John Smith's

The Masculine Mystique

Don't rock the boat, it could upset the captain and send him scurrying overboard, leaving the women and children to man the ship.

Male-female relationships just haven't been the same since women have been making waves and coveting the helm. And some men have emerged visibly shaken from the battle. After all, gone are the carefree days when a man could crack a match, inhale deeply (without fear of cancer), tip his hat and quip "Here's looking at you." These days, the lady just won't be amused.

The erosion of male supremacy is indeed a problem that should be examined more closely, and the NFB, in its great wisdom, has taken on the job.

Co-directed by Giles Walker and John Smith, *The Masculine Mystique* casts an amused eye on how four rather "unliberated" men - Blue, Alex, Ashley and Mort - are coping with feminism and modern-day women. Essentially a docu-drama, the film alternates scenes of their personal lives with head-on encounter sessions where the men bare their souls, question each other's motives and try to confront their feelings about the women they are involved with.

On the whole an honest, often amusing and touching account, the film is,

however, treading on treacherous waters, and no matter what your opinion of the film itself may be, the issues it raises won't leave you indifferent. Although the tone is lighthearted and undogmatic throughout, the film does make a statement that is bound to unleash within you a high-pitched, emotional reaction.

Blue, a charming but fussy "anal-type" bachelor, desperately wants a relationship and is searching for the perfect woman, that very special person who will sweep him off his feet. One suspects, however, that once he finds her she's sure to be only second best to his dog, Macklusky, on top of being subjected to a lifelong refrain of did-you-put-the-cap-on-the-toothpaste, dear? Alex has it all - wife, kids, house in the suburbs - and loves it, but feels trapped and is looking for more freedom. Routine can be oh-so tiresome. Ashley is separated and the father of two, and in his grim determination to assume his single parenthood, has no room for any kind of romantic involvement. Mort, on the other hand, who cares for his children, would rather welcome a chance to share this responsibility with a new, caring, and loving woman.

However different these men's problems and desires may be, they are all struggling to come to grips with a volatile situation where roles are shifting and stereotypes no longer rule. And, more importantly, they are all trying to cling to a past they understand... and can control. It is hard not to giggle as we see Blue desperately trying to charm his girl with locker-room humour, Mort pleading with his lady to move in with him-and-the-kids for a cozy life of peanut-butter sandwiches and togetherness, or Alex and Ashley simply escaping it all, one to the bar scene, the other to the woods.

Why these "regular guys" would choose to have a relationship with any of the women in this film, though, is a matter of pure masochism. No doubt cast to enhance the masculine plight, they are certainly miles ahead of them on the scale of liberation; all have seemingly emerged from the search for self with a highly rationalized life-plan and an eye out for sexist jokes. Although it is refreshing to see women in strong roles, these are on the whole too one-dimensional to be believable. Surely feminists can also be loving human beings.

The construction of *The Masculine Mystique* is essentially what makes it work. At once constructed and improvised, it combines carefully mapped-out scenes with spontaneous dialogues, and juxtaposes dramatic and documentary segments, using clever camerawork

and editing to smoothe over the transitions and contrast the tone.

Real people instead of actors are used throughout the film to increase "naturalness and believability" and, although the gamble often fails, in this instance it pays off, particularly where the men are concerned. Asked to confront their emotions and actually talk about their feelings, the men in this film are cast in a role they very seldom assume, whether in real life or on film. Therefore when they talk, you tend to listen, knowing that this is neither learned jargon nor memorized script.

Not that you learn that much from *The Masculine Mystique* - no myths are dispelled nor characters redeemed. In fact, the film raises more questions than it answers. Billed as a docu-drama, or more dubiously as "a new genre of feature-length alternative dramas," it is never made clear where the documentary - which Webster's, for one, describes as a motion picture that records news events or shows social conditions without fictionalization - ends and the drama begins. Is this the story of four specific guys or are we to believe that they are part of a widespread social phenomenon? Furthermore, the film, produced by the NFB, also features NFB employees. Is this to say that, since one of the Board's mandates is to monitor the socio-cultural pulse of the nation, the attitudes and views expressed in the film reflect those of Canadian men and women across the nation? If so, depending on your age and your degree of liberation, you might tend to disagree. Finally, what are a bunch of NFB people doing raising their collective navel-gazing to the eyes of a nation? Are they to be seen as role-models for us all? Or, can it be that if "real men" don't eat quiche, they are all working at the Board, having relationships with "real women"?

These are not laughing matters, although I suspect that none of this humour was really intended by the people involved in making the film. The National Film Board of Canada can surely not touch on such important matters without finding itself with a large controversy on its hands. Like politics and religion, the question of male-female relationships is very contentious indeed. It forces everyone to take a position and define how they themselves live, love, relate to others and perceive themselves within the society they live in. All of which makes for a pretty emotional scene.

So, to conclude, if the idea of a crew of NFB people shooting the breeze about life while you're out there earning a living is unappealing, I suggest that the obvious qualities of this film will be lost on you. But, if, on the other hand, you are curious and think you can control your own emotions enough to manage to view the film with some degree of objectivity, its humour and unpretentiousness might well win you over. *The Masculine Mystique* could just turn out to be the starting-point for a more meaningful dialogue between the sexes.

Josée Miville-Dechène ●

● Stefan Wodoslawsky in *The Masculine Mystique*: no laughing matter



THE MASCULINE MYSTIQUE p./d. John N. Smith, Giles Walker **sc.** Smith, Walker, and David Wilson **d.o.p.** Andrew Kitkanuk **ed.** David Wilson **mus.** Richard Gresko **sd. rec.** Jean-Guy Normandin **sd. ed.** John Knight **mus. rec.** Louis Hone **re-rec.** Hans Peter Strobl **assoc. p.** Ken McCready **exec. p.** Robert Verrall, Andy Thompson **l.p.** Stefan Wodoslawsky, Char Davies, Sam Grana, Eleanor MacKinnon, Mort Ransen, Annet Zwartenberg, Ashley Murray **p.c.** National Film Board of Canada, **colour** video + 16mm **time** 86 min. 40 sec.