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 the feared director Jonathan Stryker, the same name as on Stryker’s director’s credit – more of that anon! – is an audition for the plum role of mad Audra and are stalked by a mad killer – is full of opportunities for keen 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, instead are stalk-and-slash scenes, scenes of humiliation (a believable character who consitute pointlessly angry and effect the genre does have to offer).

Of course, stalk-and-slash scenes, scenes of Stryker ‘auditioning’ and ‘directing’ and material that looks like it came from a different movie.

Yet what’s left, for certain. Even that early creation, is almost a dozen shots involving a two-foot doll with a subtly horrifying face of sorrow and resentment. Whoever created that 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 Styrke’s unnecessarily furnished 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. 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 pigging around Queen’s Park.

Peter R. Simpson is the president of Simcon Ltd., a company more noted for producing television shows than good movies. *Prom Night* is theirs. It’s not likely Simcon 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**

**REVIEWS**

Edward Momowbray & 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/class, victimized by mora­p­list­ic­por­tra­y­als­of­punk­lage on­television­shows,­directors­Edward­Momow­bray 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 authen­tically because it is born out of, and respects the community that it portrays. In fact the producers and creators were very conscious of 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 documentary work, a reminder of the fact that Ruth Taylor is herself, a member of a United States, one of the groups featured in the tape.

Co-director Edward Momowbray, 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...
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 covering 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 encounters with settings 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 butussy "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. Macklucky, 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 romance. And 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 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 gaze 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 it's necessary to masculine the plight, they are certainly miles ahead of them on the scale of liberation; all have seemingly emerged from the search for self with a high rationalized, the plan as 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 sequences with spontaneous dialogues, and juxtaposes dramatic and documentary segments, using clever camcorder and editing to smooth over the transitions and contrast the tone.

Reviews are used throughout the film to increase "naturalness and believability" and, although the gamble often fails, in this instance it is not. Some of the writers are clearly not 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 mere make-believe.

Not that you learn that much from The Masculine Mystique—no myths are dispelled nor characters redeemed. In fact, the only thing you really get from the film is an answer. Stilled 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—ends and the film as a drama begins. Is this the story of four specific guys or are we to believe that they are part of a widespread social phenomenon? Further, 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 some of the nation's attitudes and the positions and experiences expressed in the film reflect those of Canadian men and women across the nation? If so, depend how much emphasis you place on the degree of liberation, you might tend to disagree.

Finally, what are a bunch of NFB people doing raising their collective navel to have a look at? Are they trying 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 handle matters without finding itself with a large controversy on its hands. Like politics and religion, the question of sex and the differences between the sexes is a very sensitive thing. Indeed it forces everyone to take a position and define how they themselves live, love, relate to others, and simulate 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 looking at their own lives is really intended, why not find you're curious and think you can control your own emotions enough to manage to view the film with some degree of objectivity? If, however, this film is unpretentious 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 Milleville-Déchelet

Stefan Wodolaswsky in The Masculine Mystique: no laughing matter

and filmmaker Christopher Lowry, the other executive producer, produced the soundtrack. The film's theme song, "Hands in Trances and Gestures with Atlantis," by Alan Collins, was the inspiration and seed for the production of Not Dead Yet. Originally conceived as a music video, Not Dead Yet grew into this full-blown, full-blooded celebration of freedom and 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 anxiety. As a music lover, I was afraid that the music would overshadow the poetry. However, it didn't. The music and video were interlinked and arranged by a sense of rhythm and feeling, creating a cohesive whole.

The message of Not Dead Yet is clear. It's a statement about the power of music and its ability to unify people. The film alternates scenes of the punk community with interviews and performances, giving the viewer a sense of the energy and passion that is characteristic of the punk movement. The film is a powerful statement about the importance of music in our lives and the role it plays in shaping who we are as individuals and as a society.