



Roberta Maxwell and Christopher Plummer in *Kingsgate*

## Jack Darcus' *Kingsgate*

It becomes evident, while watching *Kingsgate*, that one is observing the work of a Canadian "master." Jack Darcus is a director whose unique vision is fine-tuned, whose mode of expression is honed to a particular perfection for the conveyance of a powerful message.

In *Kingsgate*, Darcus makes creative use of a sensibility generally found in English Canadian film drama – deadened sound, overly dramatic musical effects, and theatrically "realistic" acting, all used here to alternately chilling and sardonic effect.

*Kingsgate* grapples with familiar fare: alcoholism and troubled couples. Darcus, with a tremendous script, takes these subjects (difficult ones to explore with new insight) and spins webs of emotional blackmail over a whitewash of contemporary malaise and alienation. The effect is not only thought provoking and moving (no small feats) but filled with black humour and altogether unnerving.

*Kingsgate* has only two principal locations: a suburban home and a country estate, the only respite being the driveways, a veranda/yard, a country path, a motel room, a barn and a car. The result is an effective, claustrophobic atmosphere. All the scenes take place in either shelters or defined paths which lead to and from them. To go out into the fields or off to work is to disappear into a void, to become lost, unanchored.

There is something about *Kingsgate* that holds you, pulls you in close to the silences, forces you to listen and to watch. The dialogue is dense,

emotion packed and often cutting. It's a literate, finely detailed screenplay. It supports the intricacies of the powerfully stylized performances of an excellent ensemble cast.

Three couples' lives are interconnected by ties of kinship and intimacy. Their individual failings fester within unsuccessful relationships. Their behaviour is constrained and distorted. These men and women do not suffer the stresses of poverty, disability or disenfranchisement. These are privileged, cerebral, white middle-class heterosexuals drowning themselves in alcohol, confused communications and repressed, misdirected emotions. And despite their efforts to push away from each other, they each crave companionship, whatever its nature. Their world is a desperate one where even the cows are drunk.

Tom (Christopher Plummer) and Marlene (Roberta Maxwell) are the overblown patriarch and matriarch who are crushed by their own destructive routines. Both alcoholics, they tear at each other emotionally, then physically in a never-ending cycle of love-hate. Tom threatens Marlene with disloyalty – he's always got a younger woman on the go – an escape route when things get too hot at home, a scalding poker to thrust at his wife and stir up the flames of anguish. She vents sorrow, frustration, then anger, in tearful verbal outbursts and fits of vandalism against him. His response: running away again, always to come back.

In the shadow of this abusive rage is their adult daughter, Fee (Elizabeth Dancoes). Although now living on her own, she cannot quite bring herself to pull completely away from her parents. The family ties are too tight. And when the pot boils over, and the emotional guts begin to spill, she reaches for the bottle herself.

Ellis (Duncan Fraser), her boyfriend, the invited reluctant observer, is continually urged to plunge into the neurotic squabbles. He's

always planning to leave but never does; his continued presence alone involves him. The only non-drinking character, the others turn to him in their desperate drunkenness to try to express what each can't bring him/herself to express to his/her mate. A little soft on strength of character, Ellis is a seemingly "together" guy with hardly an angry bone in his body – the perfect type to be badgered. Going with the flow or operating out of sheer exasperation in situations he doesn't know how to deal with, the only trait Ellis has which colours him in any way other than passive and indecisive, is his reputation as a womanizer. However, we are left with the impression that this so-called womanizing is in effect a result of his inability to be involved in an honest, challenging relationship in the first place. Living off his tenuous reputation as a professor of literature, he has one expertise: the analysis of the work of his friend and idol, the prolific writer, Daniel Kingsgate.

Alan Scarfe's portrayal of Kingsgate is a *tour de force*. His every moment on the screen ripples with pent-up hostility and searing emotional pains. Kingsgate is a man whose cutting wit, bitter cynicism, destructive creative drive and alcoholism, fire a furnace that coals never cool. He smolders in his isolated country house and its surrounding expanses, about to burst into flame with the slightest gust of instigation.

With Kingsgate lives his wife, Brenda (Barbara March), also a writer, a victim of his psychological and sometimes physical abuse, who defends herself with alcohol and a running commentary on the angst that is their existence. Always wanting to escape but never acting upon the desire, she is mired in a mutually destructive relationship that has nowhere to go but down, then under.

The film has a fascinating way of alternating between high-pitched melodrama, black comedy and the edges of psychological horror. It is indeed "social horror," mirroring severe social disarray. With *Kingsgate*, Darcus offers up the dark side of a deadly farce.

Toby Zeldin •

**KINGSGATE** *w./p./d.* Jack Darcus *co-p./p. mgr.* Tom Braidwood *p. co-ord.* Penny Gibbs *ass. p.* Paul Mears *appr. p.* Jill Brett *1st asst. d.* Ty Haller *2nd asst. d.* Robert Lee *sc. asst.* Jessica Clothier *loc. mgr.* Dean Stoker *p. acc.* Judy Wolch *p. des.* Micheal Nemirski *asst. art d.* Lawrence Pevec *set dec.* Roger Dole *asst. set dec.* Dave Ball *prop. mast.* Neil McLeod *asst. prop. mast.* Dean Eiletsen *cost. des.* Christina McQuarrie *const. co-ord.* Clare Davis *hair* Nicki King *m-ny art.* Imelda Bain *d.o.p./op.* Doug McKay *1st asst. cam.* Joel Ransom *2nd asst. cam.* Gary Kennedy *trainee* Steve Black *stills* Bob Akester *gaff.* Jeff Upton *best boy* John Dekker *gummy op.* James Sallis *key grip* Fred Ransom *dolly grip* Gordon Tait *grip* Ron MacLeay *sd. mix.* Rob Young *boom* Don Brown *sup. ed.* Doris Dyck *asst. ed.* Patricia Lambkin *trans. co-ord.* Dave Anderson *driver capt.* Peter Huff *honeywagon driver* Keith Noble *driver* Elaine Barrett *sec.* Norm Chretien, Ken Meier *1st aid/craft* Jim Rankin *craft* Tana Tocher, Lisanne Collett, Lynda Hopkins *l. p.* Christopher Plummer, Roberta Maxwell, Duncan Fraser, Alan Scarfe, Barbara March, Elizabeth Dancoes.

## Lois Siegel's *Stunt People*

*Stunt People* is a comic and steadily-paced documentary on Quebec's very own Fournier family, a four-generation stunt family whose career began in 1969 with their first feature, *Red*, directed by Gilles Carle. Siegel's film features a variety of action clips from the Fourniers' films, which include Marc-Andre Forcier's *Au Clair De La Lune*, Harold Greenberg and Claude Heroux's disaster picture *City On Fire*, John Dunning and Nicole Boisvert's *Blackout*, as well as David Cronenberg's *Rabid*, just to mention a few. In all, they have worked on over 200 features and commercials.

Also included are interviews with members of the Fournier family talking about how they got started in the business and problems finding babysitters for their children who tended to perform stunts around the house. An interesting insight is offered by one of the Fournier daughters regarding the implication of a woman doing a stunt "doubling" for a male actor – perhaps resulting in a crushed male ego.

Stunt demonstrations are introduced via animation titles that read "How to make a gunshot wound", and so on. An interview with director Larry Kent explaining a stunt for his film *Slavers* is effectively cross-cut with one of the Fourniers explaining their preparation for the same stunt. Kent was worried that the explosion of a Volkswagen wouldn't be big enough. The scene is then shown; believe me, it was big enough.

Although the film tends to bog down near the end with an extended excerpt from Ron Lee's *Country Roads*, it flows nicely overall and is an entertaining look at a family that enjoys falling

