

Eric Kramer: football to footlights

by Gilbert Bouchard

When Edmonton actor Eric Kramer describes himself as "physical" you don't argue.

The 6'3" former football player, currently starring in Theatre Network's *Odd Jobs*, says he brings a physical approach into everything he does. "That's the way I usually hit things, and it has been known to work against me," said Kramer.

"The body you bring in is the first thing people react to and you can't get over that until people get used to what you can do."

Mind you, the fact that Kramer's size and physique has led to physical roles doesn't seem to bother him that much. "That's always been my background, everything I've ever enjoyed doing has been physical, and my approach to acting has been pretty much the same thing."

"As a football player going into the U of A's BFA acting program — having a body trained to do one thing and having to work around it — taught me to work more from the inside. Physical is great, but you have to have an emotional core to back it up."

Originally from Kalamazoo Michigan, Kramer's family moved to Alberta because his father played football for the CFL's Calgary Stampeders. "That's what brought us up here — the old man's work — and the cheap education was certainly enough to make me stick around."

Kramer followed in his father's footsteps and played bantam league football, but wasn't able to continue at the collegiate level. "BFA wouldn't let me take the time to play football," he said. "BFA was pretty intense, and there wasn't time for anything else." Not even that seemed to matter much to Kramer. "I chose to go with the BFA program."

Kramer, who graduated in April of 1984 ("even though it seems like a lot longer than that"), thought the BFA program was very good, but "not everything works for everybody" within the program. "It takes most people sometime to get to know how to use the program to their own benefit."

One drawback to the program is the small number of people allowed into it. "Those were the only people you ever saw," said Kramer of the small number of fellow BFA acting students. "You get involved in everyone's personal crises and got to know how to piss people off with little effort."

One thing that Kramer did emerge from

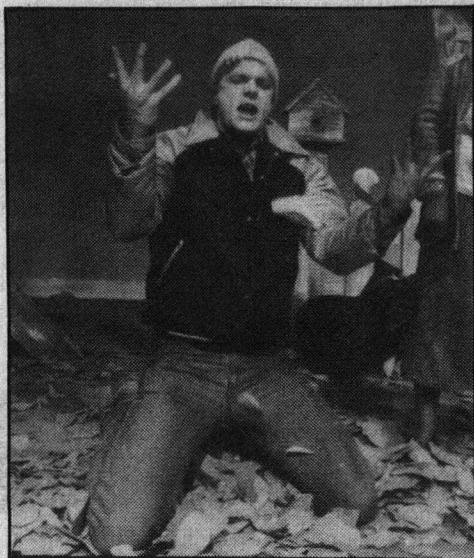


Photo Bill St. John

Eric Kramer

his BFA years was a love for fencing. "I came out of the program with experience in stage fighting and fencing, something that I want to follow up on."

What attracted him to fencing? "I've always liked swords and stuff, but I also like the swashbuckling aspect." Kramer studied under Paddy Crane (who taught Errol Flynn how to fight), and was more than impressed with both the master and his art.

Kramer describes Crane as the master of Za-Za - Za-Za being a word Crane used to describe a certain kind of fighting loaded with flair and zip. "When he goes that aspect of the art goes as well," said Kramer. "But that's something that has to be preserved. It's really quite an art."

Kramer is putting his knowledge to work both teaching fencing and choreographing fight scenes. He's going to do the choreography for the Citadel Theatre's *Pieces of Eight*, and worked with the cast of last year's *Peter Pan*. "Peter Pan was quite an adventure. Twenty kids; you gave them swords, and watched them whale on each other."

His fencing interests are just one more example of Kramer's boundless energy — energy that's paid off in almost non stop employment. "I'm not in any position to complain. Since I've graduated work has been pretty consistent. Three weeks is the

longest layoff I've had."

Not that Kramer's making money hand over fist. "I'm not in this profession for the money, and Lord knows my paychecks prove it. Acting is a matter of having your bases covered."

And Kramer has kept his bases covered. Since his graduation he's worked in two Fringe festivals, choreographed and acted in the holdover cast of *Peter Pan*, acted in Theatre Network's *White on White* last season and *Odd Jobs* this season, plus an assortment of filmwork.

But over all Kramer describes his profession as one of "feast or famine." Kramer started the season pretty shaky - looking forward to "bouncing people at the Boiling Point" (the downtown club where Kramer works as a bouncer), but has ended up turning down work. He's already turned down two film projects in Calgary, managed to sneak in filmwork on CBC's *Rattails*, and even landed the choreographing job at the Citadel.

As for his current show, Kramer is happy playing an unemployed welder in Frank Moher's *Odd Jobs*. "It's shows like this one that prove you're doing something right."

"It's so nice to be excited about going to rehearsals again. It's a joy to work with people who want to be there."

Kramer describes *Odd Jobs* as a "nice little show that doesn't try to be anything else". Kramer's been in on the show since last year when he worked on the show's workshop.

"The play's changed considerably since the first time I saw the script. But the play was so well written that there were no major changes - mainly there were character changes," said Kramer. "We (the cast) got so wrapped up in the play that we didn't quite know what we had - we didn't know how the audience would react."

But react the audience did. *Odd Jobs* is a hit, both critical and at the box office, with a lot of that success owing to Kramer's talent and energies. Energies that have seen him drop weight. "I've lost 15 lbs. doing this show. I sweat sitting down, I don't need people telling me to run around the set, and tossing toques on me. Mind you, none of the weight has been lost where I wanted to lose it - like the gut - just the parts I wanted to keep. It's sad watching your chest slide down to your knees."

What about Kramer's ultimate goals? Well, he wants to eventually film a remake of *Rollerball* with him in the lead and work steadily and settle down to a little house in Maine.

Knowing Kramer, he'll probably get it too. He has the energy and the talent, what more could you ask for.

Marcuse dancers to SUB

by Dean Bennett

For Judith Marcuse, choreographing the Repertory Dance Company of Canada is more difficult than it first appears.

"It's a complicated process," said Marcuse the Artistic Director of the RDDC. "Our base is ballet but the work we do includes jazz and modern dance. Plus we want our work to be accessible, of top quality, interesting, and challenging yet not to the point of alienating our audience."

The Judith Marcuse Repertory Dance Company is the latest project under the umbrella organization the Judith Marcuse Dance Projects Society. Formed in 1980, the Society is run by Judith and husband Richard (the general manager). It is registered as a charitable body with Revenue Canada.

The idea of the RDDC actually came out of the enthusiastic response for the Society's earlier works.

"For the last four years, we were doing dance on a project basis" said Marcuse. "We would get leaves of absences for dancers from companies around the country. We would tour one city then go home. The shows were successful artistically and at the box office. In fact one show we did with Shaw (*Mirrors Masques, and Transformations*, co-produced with Shaw Festival in

1980) we were asked to go on tour with it but couldn't. We realized it made sense to form a permanent company."

With Marcuse in control of the artistic side of things, the company could not be in better hands. A professional dancer since 1965 Marcuse has danced with both modern and classical companies at home and abroad. Since 1974, she has choreographed widely for dance, theatre and opera companies in the United States, Canada and Europe. She has won the Chalmers and Clifford E. Lee Awards for choreography.

Formed approximately a year and half ago, the Vancouver based RDDC is comprised of nine dancers plus Marcuse. Most of the members picked were soloists with their original dance companies and have worked with Marcuse before. The rest came through auditions.

The RDDC embarked on its second national tour on September 25 of this year and to date the reception has been a critical and popular success.

"We're very happy about the reception," said Marcuse, "We've got people on their feet applauding after shows."

The Judith Marcuse Repertory Dance Company of Canada appears in SUB Theatre this Thursday and Friday.

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