

Ambitious new York play

by Sally Szuster

Playwright Scott Duchesne is at it again. *Critical Mass*, Duchesne's third produced play, is undoubtedly his most ambitious venture to date.

In *Critical Mass*, Duchesne explores the relationships that bind a group of graduated high school friends together after the disappearance of one of the characters. The crisis serves as a catalyst for exploration and self-discovery that allows the characters to grow.

Going against theatrical convention, Duchesne has chosen to direct his own play. When asked how he felt about this dual role, Duchesne laughs, "I don't think I'd ever be able to direct someone else's play. As I'm writing, I know intuitively whether I have to direct it or to let someone else do it."

In a neighbourhood park setting, the six characters search for their own truths and understanding as they cling to one another for support. Says Duchesne, "This play is very personal to me. I write about characters that are intrinsically bound to one another because I believe that we are all connected to each other. Every action that we as individuals take — from our subjective perspective — affects someone or something else. Without one character, the others would not exist."

This theme also seems to apply to Duchesne's own creative process, since he believes in a collaborative effort. He says "Finally, the director has the final say, but I think that any decision should be based on the collective input."

In line with this theme, Duchesne has chosen to stage *Critical Mass* in the round. This will allow Duchesne the opportunity to reinforce the idea of "seeing things from different angles, different perspective points, so that for every audience member, the play will be an individual experience based on particular points of view."

Duchesne, who has been developing *Critical Mass* since last September, was adamant about using The Studio Theatre to stage his play. Along with his production staff, he fought many bureaucratic battles to ensure that he could lay claim to mounting the first student production in the new theatre of Fine Arts Phase 3, which had its official opening last month.

Says Duchesne of the new theatre, "It's wonderful. Technologically, it's freer. But I mostly envisioned *Critical Mass* in the Studio Theatre because its most conducive to staging it in the round."

Duchesne's somewhat eclectic theatre background, which includes criticism, Theatre Studies, Music and Philosophy as well as his membership in the improv troupe The Four Strombones, have all re-enforced his commitment to creating a group dynamic conducive to the creative process.

Duchesne, in his final year in the Theatre Studies program, has continued to workshop and produce plays in the York community. His *Prince Charming* was produced at the Samuel

preview

Critical Mass
written and directed by Scott Duchesne
Studio Theatre, Fine Arts III
November 18 to 23

Beckett Theatre in November 1989; it was subsequently developed into *Three of a Perfect Pair*, which was mounted at The Annex Theatre in July 1990.

His commitment to developing scripts is evident in the endless re-thinking and rewriting process involved in creating his plays. Although Duchesne often seems to be swimming in his own philosophic ideas, he insists that he has no intention of writing an overly cerebral play.

"The most complex things can be communicated very simply. That's why when I write my drafts, Reduction is my key word. I'm a very environmentally friendly playwright."

When asked about the title *Critical Mass*, Duchesne says: "Life is a constant unending chain reaction. Everything affects what happens. We have so much control over our lives. We are the sum total of our intuition. The play is about learning that and moving on, because inevitably, that discovery leads to better things."

Critical Mass opens November 18th and runs through to November 22nd at The Studio Theatre in Fine Arts Phase 3. The show begins at 7 pm with a staged reading of Derek Mohammed's *Life's Blood and the Strange Invaders*. Tickets are \$4.

Long legs, perfect features and drop-dead gorgeous: suffering *The Famine Within*

by Michelle Hammer

"Every age has its own idea of perfect virtue for women," a narrator's (Rebecca Jenkins) voice intones.

What is the ideal body?

Camera zooms in. Women answer: Long legs. Perfect features. A size four and drop-dead gorgeous.

So begins *The Famine Within*, a painful and honest exploration of the quest for the ideal body through dieting, starvation and exercise. The film dramatically moves from testimonials of women to the opinions of experts.

In search of new models, an agency finds only four women suitable from 40,000 applicants! The ideal image created by the camera is an illusion. But, even if the ideal body was chubby, the problem would remain: why should women be restricted to only one ideal type?

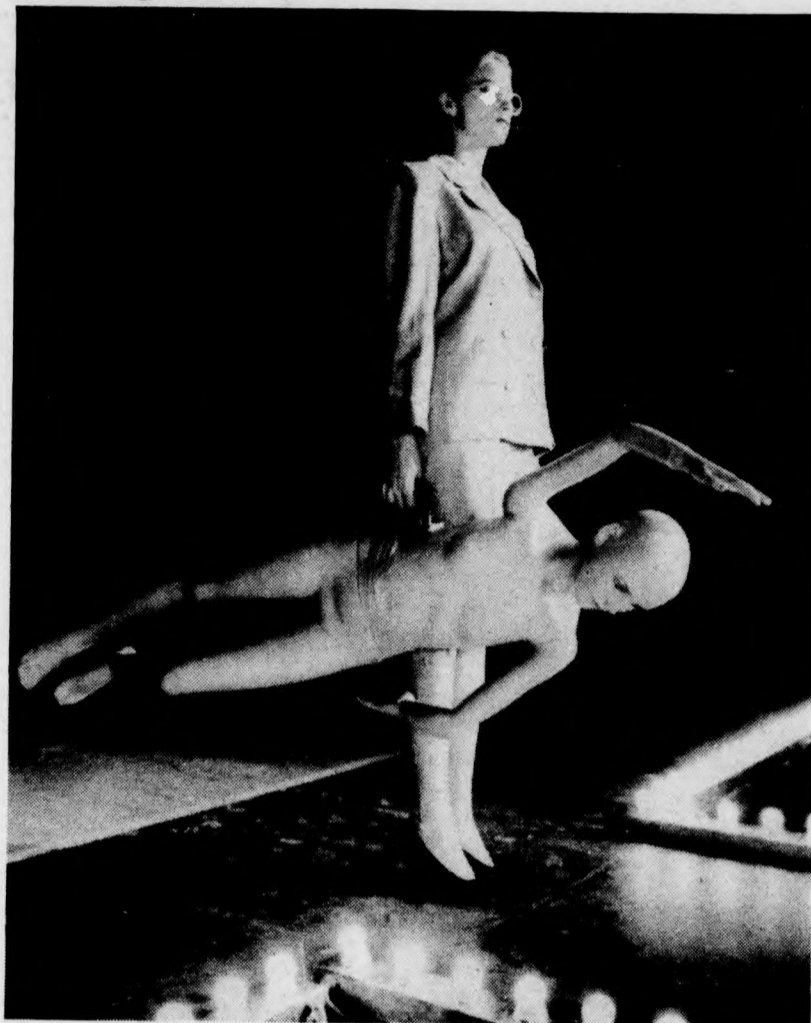
"We can never look like Sigourney Weaver," one social historian laments.

More painful than a dentist's drill are the pictures of anorexic women, emaciated bodies tortured internally by the need to lose "just a few more pounds." It starts with a simple diet. The scales become evaluators. These young girls or women feel fat and worthless even when their bones stick out.

"I'd rather be dead than fat," says one. They become a caricature of an ailing society, where values are imposed on women, mainly to be superhuman and in control of their bodies.

There is a poignant segment about obesity which unmasks our prejudices towards fat women. Research shows that claims of health hazards of being overweight have been exaggerated. In one study, women with 20 per cent more body fat than average were less likely to become ill than women with 20 per cent less.

"In an age when women are free for the first time to operate in a world outside the home, to grasp the beginnings of economic and political power, it is a peculiar irony that we have



Katherine Gilday's documentary *The Famine Within* explores the way women see their bodies, and how this view affects their behaviour, often leading to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.

preview

The Famine Within
written and directed by Katherine Gilday
produced by Libra Films
Curtis Lecture Hall F
November 17, 3 pm

never felt more pressured to define our bodies' look."

A few hypotheses are explored. Jungian analyst Marion Woodman points out that society looks down on the feminine; those qualities associated with being female — becoming, surrendering, receiving, etc. — go against the aggressiveness one needs to succeed in the world.

There is a demand, she says, to be best — the best wife, daughter, boss. Because we always aim to please someone else, the inner person is not recognized. We forget who we are. There is a deep feeling of being "unloveable;" the inner person is starving.

The Famine Within ends on a note of hope. Maybe when we reject a single body size as ideal, we will be able to accept ourselves and our bodies as they are and see the beauty in our own flesh.

The Famine Within will be screened in Curtis Lecture Hall F at 3 pm on November 17. Tickets are \$4.

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