

We're talking feminist issues and "we're talking vulva"

By E.A. JOHNSTON

As strange as it sounds, Shawna Dempsey spends a lot of her time these days dressed as a gigantic vulva. Dempsey and Cynthia Grant, two members of The Company of Sirens, were performing in the Fine Arts Faculty Lounge on Oct. 22, as part of the ongoing "Women in Art" series. Sirens is a socio-political theatre group whose work helps express and explore feminist issues.

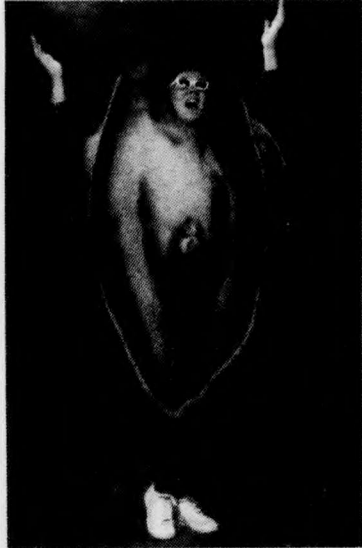
Dempsey, a recent York Fine Arts graduate, usually works in a technical or directorial capacity with the company. When she does act, she prefers performance art to theatre because there is more of a chance to "politicize the audience" when the audience is directly involved.

Audience participation is an integral part of the show. In fact, because of technical difficulties, in the Oct. 22 show, Grant needed a person to hold up the book she was to read from for her piece. I willingly obliged her request for assistance. Grant draped herself with a sheet, leaned over the podium with me hidden behind her sheet. The only part of me visible was a disembodied hand holding the book. The thrill of performance!

Because Dempsey, in her second piece, is usually accompanied by a three piece rap band, she asked the audience to snap their fingers in lieu of the music. The costume, was made out of foam sheets and painted red, a six-foot version of a vulva.

Dempsey wrote the piece herself, informing the audience on everything from hygiene to pleasure using props such as toilet paper and even a very long English cucumber.

Dempsey first choreographed this piece for The Women's Sexuality Conference last fall. She got the idea when talking to some friends and realized how little they knew about that part of their anatomy. Dempsey told the audience a story from her time at the Sexuality Conference last year. A debutante's ball had been booked in the hot same hotel as the conference. Dempsey could not resist the temptation of crashing the party while in costume, and when



VVVVVULVACIOUS! Shawna Dempsey, as the gigantic vulva, performed at the Fine Arts Faculty Lounge on October 22.

she walked through the door one of the male guests shouted: "Look everyone—a lobster." It seems that it is not only women who are in the dark about sex organs.

Both Grant and Dempsey have opted for this forum for their work conscious of the fact that it does not appeal to or reach everyone. They are content to attract the serious people who are interested and, more importantly, ready for their work. Grant has given up asking the press to attend the company's performances because she has found they do more harm than good. However, "one does not wish to sound strident or bitter," said Grant.

The question period which followed the performance generated a good deal of discussion, and the consensus reached was that the voice of woman, though tentative, is getting stronger. It was also apparent from the comments of the men in the audience that they too are becoming more aware of their role in feminist art. The conclusion was that though this kind of emerging awareness could only be seen as positive, the process has been and will continue to be very slow.

Existere's Vane a success

By OTAV LOMBARDO

Vanier College's art and literary magazine, *Existere*, has now existed in various incarnations for about 10 years. *Existere's* past has been checkered by poor distribution, inconsistent quality and budgeting problems. At various times the problems have threatened to run *Existere* into one of the many literary magazines that enjoy circulation only among its support staff.

More recently, however, a new editorial staff has taken over *Existere*. Determined to breathe new life into the mag and prepared to cover the cost of the first issue's publication, editors "njk," David Lomax, and K.J. Taylor appear to have taken the first tentative step on the road to transforming *Existere* into a class act. The latest issue, entitled "Vane," is a measure of their success.

In the first work of prose, "The Road Not Even Seen," Lomax gives an account of how a latter-day revelation of a beautiful site beyond the

top of a hill he climbed as a child paints his memories of the climb in false colours.

Fellow editors njk and K.J. Taylor each contribute several works of poetry. njk's "To My Unborn Daughter" is a description of a woman in labour, ready to give birth to a daughter who will appreciate the miracle of birth much more deeply than speaker herself. njk's other piece, "Borges at 80," is a clear, expressive tribute to the time-honoured work of the Argentinian novelist.

K.J. Taylor's poem, "Song," celebrates the early summer's unique but short-lived beauty, while the more esoteric "They come clustered" has darker, even morbid overtones. Taylor is at his best, however, in "On the Tongue," a three-paragraph description of a woman, her sailor lover and how their tattoos and body language expose the fragility of their symbiotic relationship.

Time appears to be the theme of *Existere's* final segment. Janet

Broomfield's "a longing for spring" is a verbal-visual commentary on the eternal; waiting for spring while deep in a seemingly endless winter. Her second piece, "The Planer, at Sunset" captures the quiet continuity of life in a northern lumber town.

This issue's final piece, Lee Robinson's "The Railroad Tower," is a two-paragraph work which would seem to be about the railroad and an ex-Indian lover who was institutionalized. Upon closer examination, however, the piece is actually about change, and the consequences suffered by those that the train of change leaves behind. Although this is only the first issue of *Existere* to come out since Dave Lomax, njk, and K.J. Taylor took over its editorial staff, it showed consistent, solid writing throughout. Given the time and effort that often goes into putting together these magazines and the quality of the works in this one, the editors of *Existere* should be applauded for an exceptional first effort.

A R T S C A L E N D A R

Compiled by Christine Bouchard and Heather Sangster

GALLERIES

Contemporary Greek Art, from the collection of the Vorres Museum AGYU (N145 Ross), Nov. 5-22.

Gilda Mekler Paintings, acrylics on canvas by the artist. Winters Gallery (123 Winters), until Nov. 7.

"Twinkle, Twinkle Little Bat: The House Project, The Nursery", an exhibition of new work by sculptor Ron Sandor. Glendon Gallery (York Hall, Glendon College), until Nov. 29.

Jill Umbach, a solo exhibition of the artist's work. IDA Gallery (102 Fine Arts Bldg.), until Nov. 6.

Daniela Wood and Janice Goldberg, a dual exhibition of the artists' works. IDA Gallery (102 Fine Arts Bldg.), Nov. 9-13.

MUSIC

CJRT-FM Soloists Series Concert, Philippe Djokic on violin and

Lynn Stodolo on piano from Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia. Works by Beethoven, Moravetz, and Ravel. All welcome to Winters Senior Common Room, Nov. 11 at 12:30.

Lunchtime Jazz, CHRY-FM (Radio York) presents live jazz with Larry Miller in the Vanier Junior Common Room, Nov. 10 from 12-2. Free admission—cash bar.

13 Engines, a CHRY-sponsored concert playing in the Grad Lounge, Nov. 7 at 8:00.

Rang Tango, another CHRY sponsored concert playing in the Grad Lounge, Nov. 9 at 8:00.

THEATRE

The York Theatre Department presents "Waiting for the Parade" and "Oh It's a Lovely War" from Nov. 16-28. Phone the box office at 736-5157 for information.

Theatre Glendon presents Harold Pinter's "A Slight Ache" and Anton Chekhov's "The Bear" from Nov. 3-7 inclusive at 8 in Theatre Glendon

(Glendon College). Tickets are \$4.

FILM

"A Festival of Five Films from India", part of the York-India project. Screenings will be followed by discussions. Nat Taylor Cinema at 7 on Nov. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 22.

SEMINARS

The Women in Arts Seminar Series presents Julia Barco, who will be discussing feminist film and video production in Latin America and the Caribbean. Presentation and discussion to take place Nov. 10 at noon in the Purple Lounge, 3rd floor, Fine Arts Bldg. A guest speaker, Estela Bravo, a well known Cuban video artist, will also speak and present her 3 documentaries. As well, a video production workshop will take place from 2-5:30 in the Purple Lounge.

If you are planning an arts event, write a short blurb explaining what, when and where and drop it in the ARTS CALENDAR envelope at the Excalibur Office, 111 Central Square.

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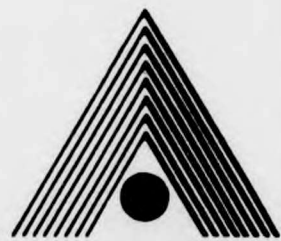
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