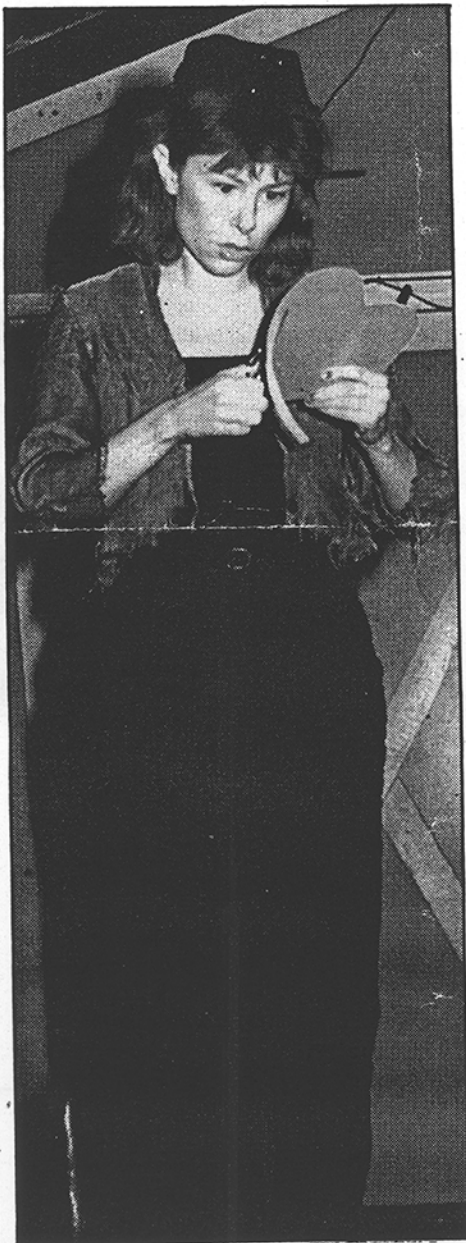


MUSIC

Ex-hooker helps open Merchants of Love show



—Photo by Walter

Gwendolyn: Outspoken activist

When *The Merchants of Love*, a month-long thematic exhibition begins Saturday at The Saw Gallery, it will be opened with a performance piece by a stripper and former hooker who simply calls herself Gwendolyn.

Gwendolyn entered the art world five years ago in order to express her strong views about the misrepresentation of sex trade workers. Among the culprits she fingers are some feminists and therapists who insist they are just trying to help.

The Merchants Of Love is a particularly appropriate forum for Gwendolyn. The multi-media series will deal with the theme of buying and selling of love in our society, a favorite subject of hers. She stresses that it is not the hookers, strippers and other sex trade workers who are the real "merchants of love." Her only concern is that her participation in the series will lead to that impression.

"I don't like to feed into the myth that hookers are selling love. We never pretend to be selling love. We are much more up front about it than that. The real "merchants of love" are therapists who pretend to love and care for you — after they get your OHIP number."

Gwendolyn has had bad experiences with therapists. When she went to them for help, she feels they took away her self-esteem and left her feeling angry at herself. Her account of them is bitter. She refers to them as "agents of social control."

"They won't accept us as equals," she charges. "Many of them get their ideas from mainstream feminist analysis of sex trade workers which sees us as victims. As a result, they victimize us. They cannot understand that this can be a choice and they have no respect for our rights to make that choice."

"I had one feminist tell me, 'You just think you like it. That is your oppression.' What is oppression to me is hear-

Nights
out

Evelyn Erskine

ing her say I don't like what I'm doing."

Gwendolyn ran away from home when she was 16 and did what she calls "the street scene." She first sought therapy to overcome a drug habit, now she says her addiction is seeking therapy. But she advocates self-help groups because there is a more democratic power dynamic. "Everyone empowers the other. If you get into a situation where one person has more power than you do, it's not healthy."

At one time, Gwendolyn felt like a pawn in a power play. "I came to therapy feeling proud of having survived the street and having been an honest hooker and a good stripper. I left feeling very ashamed and guilty of what I was. I was angry that I had been victimized. I had a bad attitude toward my audience because I had a bad attitude toward myself. I felt helpless."

Gwendolyn no longer feels helpless. She is an outspoken activist who uses any forum she can find to express her views. Her approach ranges from her membership in The Canadian Organization For The Rights Of Prostitutes to a hair-raising brand of stand-up comedy that she performs in jazz clubs, art galleries, feminist conventions and for her friends in the sex trade.

As an artist, her work also involves film, theatre and mime along with the magic she learned from her father who was an amateur magician. Her performances are often as humorous as they are painful.

While Gwendolyn continues to work hard at improving her creative craft, she still earns a living as a stripper. "It puts bread and butter on the table," she says. "Artists don't get paid very well."

She also works as a clown at children's birthday parties where she performs the sleight of hand she saw at the magic conventions her father took her to as a child. The people who hire her usually don't know about her other life in the sex trade and Gwendolyn doesn't think she could tell them.

"It's enough for most people that I'm an articulate hooker, but to be a clown at kids parties too. Well that's too threatening."

Pink Floyd in red

When the receipts were counted up, Pink Floyd's Sept. 9 concert was thick in the running for financial flop of the year. While 26,000 spectators might appear to be a heavy turnout to the untrained eye, it would have taken 30,000 to break even. Dennis Ruffo of Bass Clef Promotions which brought the expensive rock spectacle to Lansdowne Park, does not even want to utter the exact deficit out loud. "It makes me feel sick to my stomach when I even think the figure in my mind."

However, anyone who cares to multiply the \$25 ticket price by 4,000 will probably get a good clue to the number that makes Ruffo ill.

The promoter attributes the lower than expected turnout to the late announcement of the show. "There was a lot of hoopla and excitement when the shows were first announced in Montreal and Toronto. When we made the announcement a month later for the Ottawa date, we lost out on the impetus of the initial interest."

Tickets for Yoakam

Tickets for Dwight Yoakam's Oct. 25 concert at the NAC Opera go on sale Monday.