

Bliss isn't always ignorance in drama series about women

By Brian Gornat

For too long, men have claimed sexuality as their private terrain, and it's high time women staked out a turf of their own. So says Adrienne Mitchell, at least.

"We're so conditioned, as women, to see sexuality through the male gaze, I had to find out what is my gaze," the TV producer-director explains.

With Janis Lundman, Mitchell is co-producing an eight-episode anthology series of half-hour dramas that explores erotica from a woman's perspective.

Called *Bliss*, the series premieres Thursday, March 21, on TMN1 in Eastern Canada and on Movie Central in the West. It begins with four back-to-back episodes, and the second block of four stories airs a week later on Thursday, March 28.

Lundman and Mitchell are best-known as the producers of such critically acclaimed documentaries as *Talk 16*, an insider's view of the world of teen girls, and *Lawn and Order*, a strange, comic film about taste - and lack of it - in home landscaping.

The women's most recent work was CBC Television's Gemini-nominated hip-hop teen drama series *Drop the Beat*.

When they finished that show, Mitchell says, the two decided they wanted their next project to be something from a woman's perspective.

Mitchell had been reading *Heratica*, an anthology of erotic short fiction by Canadian women. It occurred to her that taking the format - short, sexy vignettes - and adapting it for television might make an interesting series.

"These stories looked at a woman's sexual experiences in a way I hadn't seen before, and certainly not on TV," she says.

The producers wanted to do something interesting with the half-hour format, Lundman adds, and they were intrigued by the idea of doing shows that "challenged women's sexual stereo-

types."

Some of the stereotypes they wanted to tear down are "that we're totally monogamous and that we like nice, safe sex," Mitchell says.

"We're intrigued by stories dealing with that - (those) that deal with a woman's desire for ravishment, for example.

"Women are writing about these things. All I know is that I'm in a situation, as a woman, where I'm restricted in what I can ask for sexually."

Certainly, the women of *Bliss* are anything but restricted in what they ask for.

In the episode "Guys and Dolls," which Mitchell directed, a successful career woman (Jenny Levine) enters into an anonymous relationship with a handsome man (Peter Wingfield) she meets in a hotel bar. They meet twice a week and know nothing about each other. At the end of each session, he pays her with an envelope full of cash.

In another episode, "Valentine's Day in Jail" - directed by Holly Dale (P4W: *Prison for Women*,

Hookers On Davie) - a prison teacher (Torri Higginson) seduces a convict (Adam Beach), and they make love under a table while the rest of the prison population watches a movie. The episode is based on a story by Susan Musgrave.

And in "Voice," directed by Lynn Stopkewich (known for the controversial 1997 feature film *Kissed*), a woman (Mikela J. Mikael) begins to dream about the wife (Veronika Hurnik) of her lover (David Lovgren) - and they end up in a relationship.

"There's a lot of testosterone in women," Lundman says, "so there are a lot of women who want to express themselves sexually."

Apparently, that's what the producers and broadcasters are banking on.

Bliss goes to Showcase later this year, after completing its run on TMN and Movie Central, and it already has been renewed for another eight episodes to air next year.

