

WHY AMERICA LOVES BEAUTY & THE BEAST

Women swoon over TV's romantic fantasy that's the surprise hit of the year

On FRIDAY nights, when the only light in the living room comes from a 19-in. TV screen, millions of women are falling in love with Vincent — the lyrically romantic half-man, half-monster leading man of the sleeper hit, *Beauty and the Beast*.

Vincent is a hairy but lovable freak of nature — tall, dark and, well, handsome may be in the eye of the beholder. He lives in the dark caverns beneath New York, emerging when his love, Catherine, is in distress.

According to fan mail pouring in to CBS, many women would love to be in the high heels of Linda Hamilton, the actress who plays Catherine.

Ron Perlman, who portrays Vincent, gets dozens of marriage proposals in the mail. Some women ask if he's married (he is) — and if so, does he fool around (he says he doesn't).

"The letters express what these women long for in their own lives," says Perlman. "They think that if they're loved, they'll be made whole, in spite of their limitations.

"I think women want to be romanced. They want to be treated specially. They want to have poetry read to them, instead of sitting there watching this guy in an undershirt watching football games.

"A woman wants somebody not who's doing nice things for her just so he can be asked in at the end of the night — but because he adores her. I think that's what they get when they see Vincent and Catherine."

Kathleen McQueeney, the agent who recommended to Perlman that he take the role of the Beast, says: "Vincent and Catherine have a distilled love in its purest form. There's a mystique to their love.

"Vincent is sensitive, but he's not a wimp. His love for Catherine doesn't detract from his strength. Women love him because he's warm, sensitive and very special. He's an ideal man for a lot of women."

Even Liz Taylor is not immune to the charms of the Beast.

Perlman recalls: "I was introduced to her at a party. She looked into my eyes, grabbed my hand and said to me in French, 'My beast, my beast.'"

The soaring popularity of *Beauty and the Beast* comes at a time when women are falling in love with the disfigured Phantom in Broadway's *Phantom of the Opera*.

Los Angeles psychologist Dr. Irene



Hamilton says Perlman is handsome in or out of makeup. "His look is tremendous."

Kassorla thinks women see their childhood fantasies come to life in their love for a beast. "Long before they are women who can really make love to a man, little girls start fantasizing about romance," she says.

"And it's a potpourri of what they

Beauty and the Beast has touched a special chord in women. Linda Hamilton (with Ron Perlman in makeup) says: "This is romance, as opposed to other shows on TV — where you have sex, but not romance."

know — a combination of the princes they read about in the fairy tales, the enchanted animals who are released to become wonderful men, the kind-hearted lions and, the most wonderful romantic prince of all — Daddy.

"How wonderful that the makers of *Beauty and the Beast* should have been so sensitive to what a little girl goes through in sexual development, to have grabbed on to one of the cores of her sexual-sensual-dream world.

"When she watches *Beauty and the Beast*, the little girl — now an adult woman — has an opportunity to play out a dream fantasy she never had a chance to complete. And through Vincent's love Catherine, she has an opportunity to continue her fantasy and enjoy it even more.

"It's a wonderful kind of gentle torture not to be able to go ahead and really consummate the love, as was

true when she was a little girl. Anytime you can duplicate a precious moment from childhood — and do it as an adult — you have magic."

Viewers agree wholeheartedly. And response has been otherworldly.

One letter to Perlman from a viewer says: "Please keep *Beauty and the Beast* on the air. I need to be able to pretend Vincent is real. I wish he were, but then if he was, I'd probably leave my husband and children and run away to live with him. And what would my mother think?"

Linda Hamilton knows the show is a different kind of love story. "This is a romance," she says, "as opposed to all the other shows on TV, where you have sex and not romance. A romance is usually something with obstacles. That's what makes it a romance. We aren't going to jump into bed here."

But Linda does love the look of ▶

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her leading man. "You have poetry and you have a beautiful beast," she says. "His look is tremendous."

Linda's manager, Bobbie Edrick, is equally enthusiastic about her client's leading man. "I find Ron very sexy in his makeup," she says. "And my aunts of 74 and 76 both think he's sexy, too. They watch him every week."

Betsy Frank, senior vice-president at Saatchi & Saatchi DFS Compton, a leading advertising agency in New York, sees *Beauty and the Beast* as TV's modern solution for love without risk.

"We all want to believe there is a romantic ideal," she says. "It's especially important for women these days when the consequences of romantic relationships can be so deadly."

Frank says the series has struck a chord with women viewers who love the "heartbreaking theme of impossible love" and see in Vincent attributes too often missing in the men they live with.

"He's the perfect man, but he's not a man," she says.

Dr. Carole Lieberman, a psychiatrist and media consultant, believes many women love the Beast because "the love he offers is unconditional."

"Women feel as if men are pursuing them only for sex and sexual conquest. But Vincent's adoration of Catherine makes no demands of her."

Lieberman also sees a return to a desire for a father-like protector in the love women express for the Beast. "Despite how independent they may seem on the outside, women still have a desire to be rescued," she says.

"They want to be taken out of their chaotic world. His appeal as the father-like protector is a bit like Santa Claus, yet there's also a touch of the appeal of the vampire."

At CBS, even cynical women staffers, who remained unmoved when Tom Selleck strolled by, now swoon for the Beast. "When he was in the building for publicity pictures, a lot of women wanted to have their photo taken with Vincent," says a CBS executive. "In his makeup, he has a noble look and a beautiful voice."

Betsy Frank has a hunch that instead of becoming more of a monster, the Beast may gradually grow more attractive.

"Next year, Vincent's makeup may become less extreme," she says. "They may even make him more human, so that women will want to see him even more." □

SOLITUDE would be ideal if you could pick the people to avoid. —
Writer Karl Kraus