

THE SKINNY LIE: Weighty subject for kids gets calorie-reduced telling

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By Kevin Prokosh

DIETING and dinosaurs are the main preoccupations of the average teens in *The Skinny Lie*.

Is playwright Michele Riml trying to make the connection that a fixation on the former will lead to the fate of the latter? Probably not, but prehistoric creatures like the Tyrannosaurus Rex did

starve to death after a meteor struck the earth 65 million years ago and destroyed plant life.

Riml, whose issue play *The Invisible Girl* so smartly explored social bullying last year, is back with another message for young people about body image and honesty.

The Skinny Lie, as expected, says all the right things but not in a particular compelling way. Director David Warburton, appropriately given the subject matter, provides a light snack.

Jessie, 11, is stung when her cool friend Deanna points out the jelly roll of fat hanging around her waist. Slim and confident Deanna wants to be a dancer and figures calorie-counting will help reach her goal. She urges Jesse to shape up with a self-help book full of platitudes like, "Be thin to win." Jesse gives in to peer pressure.

Meanwhile, Jessie's younger brother Josh is T-Rex crazy and gets himself in trouble with he lies to his dino-pal Sam that he has a dinosaur tooth for their science project. His mother is not telling the truth, either, about the trip his father is on.



From left, Matthews, McGrath and Millar in a scene from *The Skinny Lie*. (Hubert Pantel Photo)

The visual fun starts with that first fib that is accompanied by the sight of a polka-dotted dinosaur egg behind the set. Only the audience can see that the more lies told, the larger the red-eyed T-Rex grows. Like some prehistoric Pinocchio, the impressive dinosaur, co-designed by Linda Leon and Shawn Kettner, grows to four metres tall.

Jessie's secret dieting allows her to successfully slip into the size 2 jeans she so wants to wear to the big concert. But just as Jessie is feeling triumphant, Deanna fails at the tryouts, gives up dancing and finds solace in four scoops of ice cream. When Jessie faints, all the family's problems are brought to a head and are happily solved.

After a 12-week provincial tour, the young cast of Kristin Millar (Jessie), Erin McGrath (Deanna, Mom), Tom Keenan (Sam) and William Matthews (Josh) are at obvious ease with the material.

The Skinny Lie title refers to the fallacy that people need to be skinny to get what they want. The timeliness of the message is beyond dispute with Canadian statistics revealing that 42 per cent of 13-year-old girls and 48 per cent of 15-year-old girls say they need to lose weight.