

Edmonton's Christopher Moore

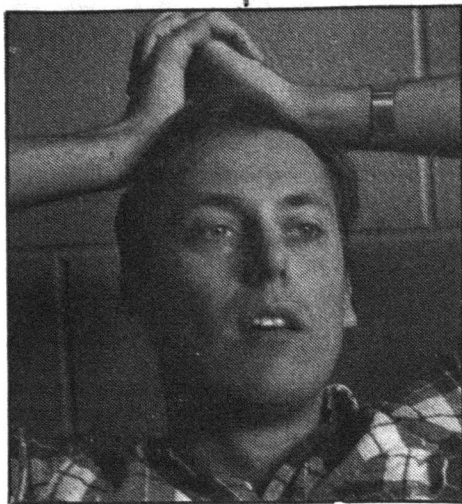


photo Rob Schmidt

by James MacDonald

Local actor Christopher Moore is well travelled in his relatively short career. The son of an Anglican minister, Moore was born in Sedgwick, Alberta, and raised in Fort Saskatchewan. He is now playing two roles in the Citadel production of *Quiet in the Land*. Last Thursday he granted *The Gateway* this interview.

Gateway: Your first post-secondary drama program was at S.A.I.T. Could you tell us about your program there?

Moore: The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology program is called Television Stage and Radio Arts. They didn't offer a stage program by itself, but at that time, I didn't think I was particularly interested in the stage. It's a two year program, but I went for three years. The first year they throw everything at you, electronics, radio and television broadcasts, news. Second year you specialize, and I specialized in camera operations. Then I went back for a third year taking news writing. At this time I was basically interested in production. We had only four hours of drama per week, and it was basically my last year at S.A.I.T. that I got really active in acting. The drama was both for stage and television productions. When I got done with that, I thought to myself, hey, here's something I enjoy even more than writing commercials, so I thought, if I can get paid for it, I'd like to choose a career that I enjoy doing, and acting is fun. Also, most people need entertainment. Then I saw Mark Schoenberg, who I had worked with at an independent drama camp in Drumheller, and who at that time was the regional auditioner for the American Academy of Dramatic Arts.

Mark recommended me, and they accepted me, so I went to California. It was a two year program, basically five days a week, ten hours a day. There was 170 of us the first year. They invite 70 back for second year, and the third year there were 28 of us in a repertory company. There were no formal classes that year. You were cast, you rehearsed and you performed. We did about five or six productions, in one of which I had the lead. It is a really small town in Hollywood. It's amazing who you get to know. Certain casting agents came and went, and we had guest directors and actors asked to perform with the students.

Gateway: Why didn't you stay?

Moore: Well, after I graduated, I stayed for a year, because I guess I wanted to be a movie star. I got to know a line producer and an associate producer of *Soap*, which was then cancelled, and she as much as told me that the only work I could expect to get was atmosphere and background. I had interviews with casting agents at 20th Century Fox and M.G.M., but I may have made a mistake in telling them I was Canadian right away, and that seemed to be my downfall. They also said that all I could expect to get was the dead body, or the extra on a cop show. Knowing I was Canadian, they just didn't want the hassle with immigration; they could easily get an American for the job. So I had a lot of trouble with immigration, and I spent most of my time working under the table, at various non-acting jobs.

Gateway: So you finally decided, that's enough hassle, I'm going back home.

Moore: I was under a lot of pressure from friends to stay, but I found it increasingly difficult to keep a job for any length of time, after they found out I was working illegally.

Gateway: So you came back?

Moore: I was on my way to Toronto, and I stopped here in Edmonton for a friend's wedding in September of '83, and I've been working fairly consistently ever since. Since I

came back I've gained my American Equity status for the stage union, and my Canadian Equity. It's kind of ironic that I gained my American Equity status while working in association with an originally Canadian production.

Gateway: What are the advantages of Equity status?

Moore: They sent me the book a few weeks ago, but I've only looked at it a couple of times. I guess it's the same as any union; they look after you in terms of hours worked in proportion to hours off and there's a certain pay scale, with minimum rates, dependent on the capacity of the house, and that's nice. Now, even though TV work pays a lot more, you still can't complain about the stage either. The only thing is, you're not working 12 months out of the year, and in my experience the work is all at once or nothing at all. You know, a few months you'll be twiddling all the thumbs in the house, and then you'll get six offers at once, and that's what happened to me.

Gateway: Would you like to stay on the stage or would you prefer to do TV work?

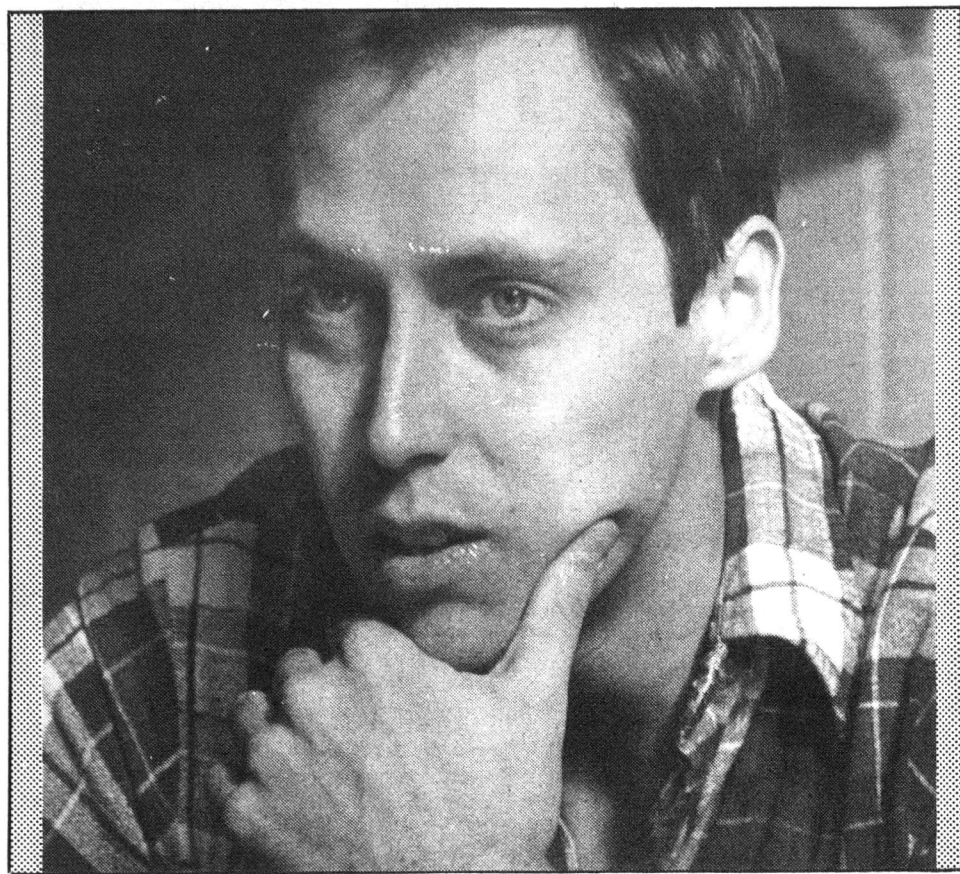
Moore: I think the stage is an excellent foothold to move from. It's more of an intense relationship in the development of a character in conjunction with a director. You're usually given three weeks to rehearse and to develop a character, and once you get on stage with it you can make further modifications; a lot of the time it's in terms of the reaction you get from the audience.

Gateway: Do you have any other creative interests?

Moore: I'm getting more involved with production. Television is a lot cheaper if you want to get into independent production, but the technical side of film is more attractive to me. So I'm taking workshops with FAVAA (Film and Video Artists of Alberta), and I'm writing a screenplay right now. I can see myself in the capacity of a kind of creative consultant. If I can come up with a screenplay or teleplay and be involved with production to the extent where I can put my two cents in with the director, without actually directing, while still acting, then I'd be in seventh heaven.

Gateway: Let's talk about the play at bit. I was particularly impressed with the directorial work.

Moore: We had an unusually short rehearsal period for this play. It couldn't have come together so quickly if the director hadn't done the play before, and a lot of the cast has done the play before, in Manitoba. James (director Roy) is married to playwright Anne Chislett, so he was in close contact with her about it, and therefore has an excellent insight into the people themselves. Some



Christopher Moore

photo Rob Schmidt

Mennonites went to see the play in Manitoba and they loved it. (The sect) is not commercialized in any way, the play is true to the nature of their doctrine, without adding any other element of commercialism into it. The violence is suggested, but not shown.

Gateway: Have you got any projects coming up?

Moore: I'm in the situation where it's either nothing or all at once. A lot of theatres want you to make a commitment far in advance, and more often than not it will fall through, so I'm learning to say, "I don't know yet." I had a script mailed to me from the 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon, for a show to open their season. They called, and I made a verbal commitment to them to do it. Soon after that, I received a call from Theatre Network, and they wanted me to do a show in the same time slot. That would have been a lot easier for me in terms of staying in the city and all, and they probably pay more, but I've committed myself to the other one. The Saskatoon play is called *The Great War*, and that will carry me through to the beginning of December, and after that, I don't know. In television, they call you in to audition, you go right away, and you usually know if you got the part the next day. So one day you could,

be wondering where your next meal is coming from and the next week you could be involved in a four-day shoot, and have a couple of thousand dollars in the bank.

Gateway: Do you plan on staying in Edmonton?

Moore: I plan on trying to stay in Edmonton. I've been away all summer, and it's good to do out-of-province stuff to be nationally known, but I'd like to base myself in Alberta. I'm going to take it as it comes to a certain extent, but I think I've come a long way since I've come back to Edmonton. I used to be a dreamer, but I've learned that you have to get out there and do. There are a lot of actors out there, along with a lot of talent that goes unrecognized.

Gateway: Do you think prospects are good in Edmonton?

Moore: There's a lot of good theatre in Edmonton, and Edmonton is making a name for itself in other ways. There are some good prospects for television and film work. Many people believe that Toronto won't be the centre (of the Canadian entertainment industry) for very long, and that Edmonton, or Alberta, could take over some of the film industry. I can't see this happening for a few years yet, but it'd be nice if it would.

You're joshing us, Mordecai

Joshua Then and Now
Twentieth Century Fox
Westmount

review by John Charles

If you put a Cuisinart on "Mince" and made a movie it would come out a lot like *Joshua Then and Now*. The pity is that director Ted Kotcheff had *Joshua* author Mordecai Richler for his partner.

This movie is a perfect example of how not to film a book. Richler's 1980 novel is dedicated to Kotcheff, a Montreal boyhood friend, so maybe the two felt they owed it to each other to collaborate in Kotcheff's medium, especially when their movie of *Duddy Kravitz* captured a lot of the book.

But *Joshua* is a sprawling book — richer in some sections, but not as satisfying as *Duddy*. Page by page it's a highly entertaining series of vaudeville turns in prose. But it needs those contrasts of light and shade, and that torrent of conflicting voices which make it Richler's longest work. Reduce it to a core plot and you suddenly observe it has none.

Richler went through 19 drafts for his screenplay, and he was mostly concerned with saving individual funny lines. So scene after scene is constructed around giving us Richlerian gags with little sense of the context that made them shrewdly amusing.

Richler clings to the novel's elaborate flashback structure instead of realizing that it's the first thing that needs to go if he's going to make a coherent movie of this particular tale. So the movie starts in the "now,"



Alan Arkin (left) and James Woods: a perfect example of how not to film a book.

with Joshua's (James Wood) life-crisis, but before we grasp anything we're in flashback land.

Joshua's childhood is disposed of with one pretty tracking shot of an open air market, plus some classic funny stuff from Alan Arkin as Joshua's father. But a lot of the lines are better read than enacted, and Arkin is doing a star turn, not creating a character.

If you're going to construct a movie of little, bitty scenes you need a cast that looks dead-on so we're convinced they are these

characters. But James Wood isn't believable for a minute — as a writer, as a wit, or as a Jew. And few of his colleagues embody the necessary qualities to be convincing.

So the movie sputters on, like two hours of previews. It's impossible to care about Joshua and his dilemmas, or to believe that world exists — unless you constantly refer back to the novel. Richler's concerns and world view start looking pretty sour, cold and shallow.