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Mavor Moore: 50 years in theatre & still at it

By Mark Monfette

"I've all my life been a writer, an actor, a director, an organizer, a businessman, a composer and I generally manage to function in a rather schizophrenic way on all these various levels."

The speaker is Mavor Moore. On a typically hectic Wednesday afternoon he has found time to talk about his varied career and about the last 50 years of Canadian theatre. The one level he has forgotten to mention is that of teacher, a function he has been enthusiastically engaged in for most of his life and, for the past nine years, as part of York's Department of Theatre.

For most of this century, in fact, the name Mavor Moore has been inseparable from the performing arts in this country. Professor Moore's mother, Dora Mavor Moore, was both a distinguished actress and director and one of the shakers and movers in our burgeoning theatre scene. It is from her, presumably, that Moore inherited both his love of the stage and his energy. He has had a hand in virtually every aspect of thespian life, usually juggling his roles with uncommon dexterity, though occasionally discovering, as when he was a drama critic, that some roles mix better than others.

director of the St. Lawrence Centre and a chief producer for CBC Television. He was recently involved with the 1812 Committee, a group formed to protest government cutbacks in the arts, and is a member of the Canada Council.

More importantly, however, he has written over one hundred plays for the stage, television and radio and innumerable essays and articles on the arts. He was the librettist for the highly acclaimed opera *Louis Riel*. And, at 59, he is still going strong. This fall his new musical comedy, *Love and Politics*, will open the TAP season at the St. Lawrence Centre and his musical-adaptation of the Frances Burnett novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy* will appear in London and then, possibly, at the Theatre Guild in New York. And more, much more — a new opera libretto, several small roles in upcoming films and on and on.

The secret of Moore's productivity, apparently, was his precocity. "I must have started writing plays almost as soon as I could write," he tells me. By the time he was seven or eight he had read through the entire Shakespeare canon. He had seen one of his early works, a verse drama about Pandora's Box, produced when he was 11. By 14 he was a professional, making regular appearances on a children's radio serial.

It was through his work in radio, both as an actor and writer, that Moore managed to finance his way



Randy Bregman

to college, attending the U of T during the mid-1930's. "I was all over the place," he recalled. "I was into everything, particularly plays, needless to say, but, also, I was president of the philosophical society and God knows what else."

His myriad activities caused him to fall his second year but he adjusted, changed his discipline from English to Philosophy, and managed to get through. After college he joined the army, trained in Canada for two years and was then sent to London. In England he moved from the infantry to army intelligence, learning about psychological warfare and dodging bombs. When he returned to Canada

the sense that it's over, but I think that we've had our breakthrough."

The next couple of decades saw the activity of Mavor Moore and of Canadian theatre continue to grow. The two, in fact, seem to have grown up together and are, in many ways, interrelated. The diversified, circuitous paths which Moore has been forced to follow reflect the changing ways in which dramatic expression has found a voice in this country. In the twenties and forties it was in radio, in the fifties on television and in the sixties and seventies on one of the many newly created stages. For both, adaptability was the key to survival.

One of the most enjoyable periods in Moore's career was during the years 1959-60, as drama critic for the now forgotten Toronto Telegram. His arrival at the paper indirectly brought about Nathan Cohen's departure and his subsequent employment with the Star. The Globe drama critic, at the time, was Herbert Whitaker.

"If I may say so," said Moore, "I think those years saw some of the best criticism done in this city."

The relationship between the three highly respected critics was both competitive and friendly. They often exchanged cavils, Moore recalled, both verbally and in print. The experience, however, was somewhat short lived. After two years Moore found it "increasingly difficult to work on both sides of the fence" and so retired.

The state of journalistic criticism today, according to Moore, is "shockingly low." He laments the loss of basic writing skills in our critics and finds them "mired in a sort of nineteenth century intellectual arrogance that is simply way out of date." They speak "as if they were pundits with the laws of Moses in their possession." On the whole, Moore finds them "dogmatic critics who seldom know enough about their subject and can seldom write well enough to express it even if they did."

His wrath changes to smiles, however, when I ask him about his nine years at York. He has taught, at one level or another, for most of his life and clearly loves it. During his time at York he has seen, he believes, three or four different generations march through. In the early seventies "a great many young people were determined to get what they wanted — but they didn't know what the hell that was."

Now, he says, "they want to know what the rules are and they want you to ask them to conform to the rules even if they reject them."

"However," he adds, smiling slightly, "since art is all about discipline I don't object to this. I think anyone who wants to get anywhere as an artist and fancies he can do so without facing problems of discipline is simply in for a terrible shock someday." Art without discipline, he claims, is like taking a piss: "It's compulsive and really

doesn't demand much of you." This last comment succinctly sums up Moore's criticism of theatre production a decade ago. He thinks that many plays produced then were either unrehearsed or, at best, underrehearsed.

"Now," he says, "one seldom goes to the theatre when one doesn't see a professionally put together and presented work". Moore finds this assurance and discipline evident in both in professional productions and in student ones.

At 59, Mavor Moore has established himself as one of the more prominent figures in Canadian theatre. By almost any standard one would think his career a success. And yet it isn't to him. He tells me that he is not particularly proud of what he has accomplished.

Why? "I don't think I've done what I might have," he says matter of factly, leaning back in his chair. "I've been too dispersed. I've done

too many things and not concentrated nearly enough on my writing. I got into production largely because there were no companies to put my plays on but then I stayed with production too long. I find it all interesting and fascinating and delightful but I should have been more rigorous with myself about what I really wanted to do."

If he hasn't done what he wanted it would seem, to many, to be because of love rather than lack of discipline. His intense, contagious enthusiasm for the stage and his delight in dealing with people seem to have distracted him more than anything else.

In any event, his career is far from over.

"A most interesting thing," he comments, "is that like a great many members of my family, curiously, I'm still at it and see no signs of a lessening of enthusiasm. I'm going to keep writing as long as I can."

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The courtroom is tense over gay paper

By B.J.R. Silberman

The air is tense in the courtroom. There are open, out-of-the-closet gays and lesbians rubbing shoulders with members of the evangelist group, Renaissance International. From time to time mutterings can be heard across the room when controversial items are brought before the judge.

The men on trial are the three editors of *The Body Politic*, Toronto's leading gay newspaper. According to a press release they are charged with "using the mails for the distribution of obscene materials...and...possession of obscene materials for the purpose of distribution."

If convicted they could face sentences of up to six months in jail and fines of \$500 each. The corporation, the Pink Triangle Press, could be fined up to \$1,000.

The charges surrounded an article which was printed in the last issue of 1977. Entitled, *Men Loving Boys Loving Men*, it dealt with pedophilia, a situation in which an adult has a sexual relationship with a child. This phenomenon is a much ignored topic in society and few things have been written on it. The particular article dealt in some depth with the relationships that three men had had with boys, aged 7 to 12, in the past.

It spoke of how they met. One man taught in an elementary school and was occasionally approached by boys who would actively cooperate and, in several cases, even initiate the sexual act.

Another man, aged 48, met boys in movie houses. He would take them out to a fast food restaurant and once in a while a relationship would develop out of the new friendship.

The article attempted to be straightforward and factual. Nowhere was there mention of men coercing young boys into having sex. There was only one item of seduction and it was the boy who seduced the man.

Writer Gerald Hannon stated that he was not advocating pedophilia in his article. He also said he was not condemning it.

"I tried to take a sympathetic view of it." He added it was biased "only in the sense that pedophilia is not usually written about."

The article which appeared in the December 1977 issue of *Body Politic* came at a time when the political atmosphere surrounding gay issues was overly tense.

The Emmanuel Jacques murders had recently been exposed. Anita Bryant was at the height of her anti-gay campaign. Over the summer a special group from the Ontario Human Rights Commission had had a long series of hearings calling for changes in the Human Rights code. One change was the inclusion of sexual orientation.

In *Metro*, Toronto Sun columnist Claire Hoy had already written a set of articles condemning homosexuality. One of the editors on trial, Ed Jackson, described them as "a kind of hate literature...people believed they could go out and beat up homosexuals."

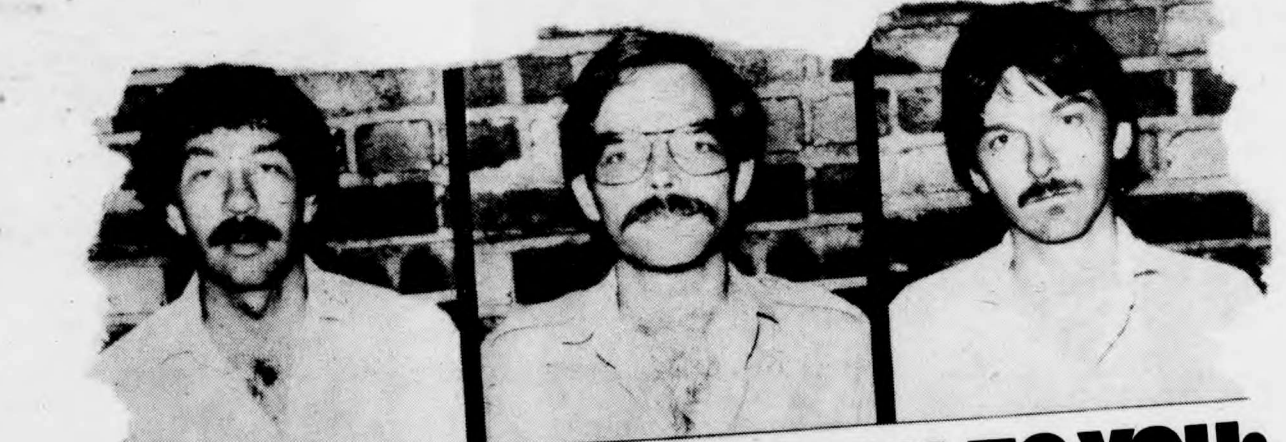
Then came the Hoy articles attacking *Men Loving Boys Loving Men*. It was the ultimate spice to be thrown into the pot. The stew steamed quietly and the paranoia that had been growing over the months suddenly came to a full boil.

Attorney General Roy McMurtry, pressured by such groups as Renaissance International, ordered a RCMP raid on the office of *The Body Politic*.

The "Operation P (for pornography) Squad" entered the premises of the gay newspaper and took, according to Jackson, "twelve packing cartons" of material including subscription lists, both present and out-of-date, containing the names and addresses of subscribers.

Six days later charges were laid against the Pink Triangle Press and three of its members suddenly found themselves on trial in one of the most intriguing courtroom dramas of the year.

The gay community across Toronto, and at York, have been affected in many ways by the events surrounding the *Body Politic* trial. Some homosexuals have been



WHAT WOULD IT MEAN TO YOU?

If these three men went to jail?

intimidated by the police seizure of the subscription lists. Jackson said "a lot of homosexuals who are still in the closet at their places of employment may lose their jobs if they are discovered."

"There is no guarantee whether they (police) will or will not use the subscription lists. We cannot prove it if they copy the lists," he added.

Many students from York, both gay and straight have attended *The Body Politic's* trial. One professor, Thelma McCormack of the York-Sociology department, testified at a recent hearing. She was chosen by the defense counsel for her expertise in the field of mass communications and for her writings on pornography.

McCormack said she felt the article was a political issue and that the public needed more information on pedophilia.

"The article discusses a kind of behaviour that no one wants to accept and that is certainly illegal, but the article does not advocate this behaviour," she said.

Hoy disagrees with this. When contacted recently he stated that he hadn't changed his mind on any of the issues. He also denied an allegation that he had attacked the *Body Politic* article without

having fully read it. Kay Ochiltree, a member of the Osgoode Gay Caucus, said that at one point in the trial she found herself seated next to Hoy. She described him "as obviously a likeable, but unintelligent man." Jackson described him as dangerous saying, "He's incited a lot of readers of the Toronto Sun to activity by calling for no legal protection for gays."

Hoy stated that he regarded homosexual activity as "immoral and depraved." He said he based this on his "particular sense of morality and religious beliefs that are shared by the vast majority of people in the country."

He was distressed by Mayor John Sewell's recent speech which was designed to calm the political atmosphere surrounding the *Body Politic's* trial. In it Sewell, who

refuses to speak to Sun reporters, spoke of the necessity for freedom of the press and the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Human Rights code.

Hoy said of this speech, "I think Sewell did a great disservice. I thought he had more brains. He totally distorted the issues." He described the mayor as being "suckered into taking the position he did at the time he did."

The trial is now drawing to a close. The last hearing was held downtown Tuesday morning. Jackson said, "it has been a worrying time for all of us wondering what will happen."

If the Pink Triangle Press is convicted, Jackson is confident that the newspaper will not be closed down. He said their operations might be hampered and the writers intimidated but that *Body Politic* would continue to be published even if he and his two colleagues were absent from the editorial staff for six months.

York gays are not so sure that the trial will end so calmly if the three editors are convicted. Chuck Wheeler, a member of the Gay Alliance at York says, "we will fight like hell... in our anger we will retaliate.... we know our rights and we will no longer be silent."

Faculty aids political prisoner

By Kim Llewellyn

The York University Faculty Association voted on November 22, 1978, to sponsor a political prisoner from Argentina under the new refugee sponsorship system introduced by the Ministry of Employment and Immigration in May 1978.

The motion was introduced by economics professor John Buttrick and overwhelmingly endorsed by the union membership.

The Ministry of Employment and Immigration has announced that Canada will accept up to 100 political refugees and their families

from Argentina, and will give preference to those with relatives or sponsors in Canada.

According to Bob Parkes, of the Immigration Canada program in Toronto, the sponsor must take responsibility for the refugee for the first year of his stay in Canada. The duties of a sponsor include meeting the refugee on arrival, providing counsel and orientation to Canada, and assisting in finding employment and accommodation.

YUFA, through connections in Argentina, is presently trying to track down the names of suitable candidates for its sponsorship.

Preferably the candidate will be able to fit into a university environment.

Canada's immigration department defines a refugee as "those having a well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political opinion".

To date only one Argentinian political prisoner has come to Canada with the aid of a sponsor. According to a spokesman from an Argentinian human rights group in Toronto, she was imprisoned for four years without being charged.

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