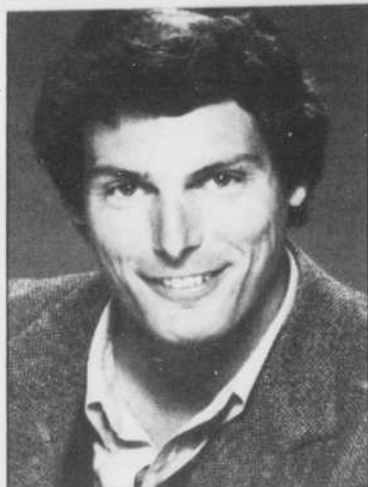


Christopher Reeve

(Continued from page 11)

that continues to be a good one," he continues, "and I think *Superman III* is going to be the best yet. We're not just taking up space with these movies, cranking out a series like *I Love Lucy*. I don't just get up in the morning and phone it in. Everyone involved keeps refining the concepts and in each film I think there's a distinct shift of tone, style and point of view. Part One really emphasized Americana and all the mythological overtones of the pop hero. Part Two was more tongue-in-cheek, more like a comic book. Part Three is going to be more complex psychologically. We're going to call it 'Superman vs. Superman.' Imagine that Superman comes apart at the seams ... that he is somehow trapped in a schizoid split and the two sides of his personality battle each other. It's sort of an id versus super-ego idea, taking the Clark Kent/Superman notion and magnifying it intensely. It's going to give me a lot to do. A real challenge and a chance to break some new ground."



As sympatico as Reeve seems to be with the character he has brought to screen and to life, the idea of an open-ended Superman saga leaves him decidedly non-plussed. "I've signed no contract," he remarks. "I did Part Three because it seemed like a good idea. I define a good idea rather narrowly. A good idea for making a film is *not* to bank three million bucks. After awhile money really does lose its meaning. There's such a thing as being *too* rich. *Superman* was a chance to do something better than people expected, and I think both films were a hell of a lot better than what was anticipated. I thrill at the chance to exceed people's expectations, and as long as that element is present, I'll do the films."

Sandwiched before and after the

releases of *Superman I* and *II* were a pair of Reeve vehicles that did as much to induce yawns from filmgoers as the tremendously successful super hero series did to excite thrills. *Somebody in Time*, a dismal romance, cast Reeve as a maudlin time traveler pining for a turn-of-the-century Jane Seymour. A near complete box office abortion, it fared only slightly worse than the thin film version of Ira Levin's talky Broadway mystery *Deathtrap*, which squandered Reeve's considerable on-screen charm on a static bad guy ultimately more dull than dangerous. As richly deserved as both flicks' plunge to late night cable fare might be, Reeve refuses to pronounce the post mortem. "I don't praise or put down any of my past work," he insists. "Why should I? It doesn't suit my purpose simply to provide a good quote. Everything I've done seemed like a good idea at the time and I refuse to be lured into critiquing my work in public. What I *will* say is that I've played over 90 stage roles and been in five movies to date. I don't think you can say I've been tested in film in any significant way."

Well tested or not, the question arises, given the public response to his un-Superman film ventures,

whether Reeve is in peril of imminent typecasting, whether he will eventually discover that the only role folks will pay to see him in is the Man from Krypton. The assertion makes him positively bristle.

"That's a question the media keeps asking because they can't think of anything else to ask," he responds, promptly and pointedly. Suddenly Reeve's sunny nature seems clouded ... more than a little hostile, as if the very suggestion that his nearly overpowering association with the character of Superman — evident even here, sitting around in old clothes in a badly decorated office — might prove a professional liability. "To assume that type-casting is a danger with any actor is to be totally out of touch with what's possible today." Even the fact that the last actor to play the Man of Steel — George Reeves on the popular television series — committed suicide when the show's cancellation effectively ended his acting career, doesn't seem to faze Reeve. In fact, he's getting angrier. "The Fifties and the Eighties are just not the same. I'm delighted that children will think I'm Superman from now until I'm 90. But children don't cast movies. Audiences are more sophisticated than they used to be. They want actors first and stars second. The movie industry understands that. Only the media lags behind. I mean, Robin Williams does *Popeye* and then does *The World According to Garp*. Sylvester Stallone does *Rocky* and then ..." he hesitates, his voice trailing off.

Whatever the potential for Reeve to become a one-role actor, he's absolutely convinced that his upcoming lead role in *Monsignor* will put the issue to rest — and in the process muzzle the media hounds — once and for all. "Christopher Reeve," trumpets the press handout, "stars as *Monsignor*, the priest who knows the streets as well as he knows his God." It's a line only a publicist could love and one that points up what may be a particularly sticky marketing problem for the Frank Perry-directed film concerning the life and times of an American priest rising through the Vatican hierarchy.

"This is *not* a religious movie," insists Reeve as if aware already of potential problems in accessibility attached to the subject matter. "It could take place on a submarine. It's about a pure man in a corrupt system, trying to learn how to be true to himself and still play by the rules. It's about being religious and being a human being at the same time and discovering it's not always possible."

It's also about the mafia, Vatican political intrigue and a tragic love affair between the Monsignor and an Italian nun, played by Genevieve Bujold. "It's the best part I've seen for an actor in a long, long time," Reeve remarks. "A lot of bankable stars were ready to kill for the role. I consider myself fortunate to have gotten the part. I studied hard to learn specifically what it was like to walk, talk and act like a priest; to feel comfortable in the vestments, to know how to deliver the liturgy."

All that hard work is perhaps why Reeve feels especially sensitive to crass media puns, such as a recent

Time Magazine photo blurb that began, "Able to preach long sermons in a single breath ... look, up in the sky, it's Superpriest! It's no wonder there is precious little love lost between Reeve and the at-large press."

"If someone is rude and vulgar you can respond in the same way or you can turn your back and talk to someone more pleasant. I simply turn my back. The press has proven time and again that it doesn't respect entertainment figures ... any human being, no matter how visible, deserves respect. It's a high wire act at the best of times and they're always there, wishing you'd fall off instead of hoping you'll make it to the other side."

Part of making it to the other side for Reeve is to rigorously protect his private life. His tight-lipped precautions are understandable — as an unwed father he considers any intrusions on his off-screen time as potentially damaging to his son, Matthew. (The fact that Reeve and the child's mother, Gay Easton, continue to live in unwedded bliss, seems to unsettle a great many people.) "When Matthew was born I tried to head off what I knew was going to come," he sighs. "I made the announcement and hoped that would be it. I should have known better. A year later *People Magazine* did a cover story on me, and the reporter spent seven hours in interviews, waiting until my guard was down and then springing some questions about Matthew and a lot of other things he had no business knowing. What was given out as off-handed remarks became the focus of the story. I mean, a lot of people thought it was as cute as the dickens, but I realized then that if you give up your private life, you're left with nothing. I'm not going to let that happen again."

Matthew, Reeve claims "is the most important thing in my life," before adding in quick contradiction, "of course, work comes first. I just don't have a lot of time. I took my first vacation in three years this year. I spend whatever off time I have playing with Matthew, practicing my piano, flying gliders, sailing and skiing. I also run a twin-engine airplane charter service out in New Jersey which gives me a lot of pleasure, but I guess you could say I'm not sufficiently mellow to consider chucking it all and floating down a river on a raft with my son. I think it's reasonable and fair that a young man with just one shot to create some kind of identity for himself should give his career top priority. I want to accomplish something that later on I can remember when I'm sitting on the porch in the rocking chair." He pauses before adding, "My life has got to add up to something more than just being a good daddy. That's easy ... you don't have to be particularly gifted to see what a child needs in life. Only a dummy could miss the love and playfulness that you give and get from a kid. There's no reason why you can't have both. My son understands; when I'm working everyone has to back off until I get the job done. I'm concentrating on acting and I don't consider myself a freak for giving it everything I've got."

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