

Sex-Change Movie Reaches Screen

By DOROTHY MANNERS

HOLLYWOOD — Sat in a projection room watching the rough cut of the first sex-change shocker to reach the screen, "Christine," — the other is "Myra Breckinridge."

Edward Small's film based on the life of Christine Jorgensen, the ex-GI who underwent an operation changing his sex from male to female, is guaranteed to rattle the back teeth of viewers. But the script and the direction of Irving Rapper handles the sensational subject as engrossing case history in medical annals. It is a far switch from the jazzed up treatment Gore Vidal and Mae West will bring to "Myra." Proof of this point is that "Christine" goes forth to theatres next month with an "R" rating. And not the "X" actually expected by United Artists and Small.

But to me, one of a dozen witnesses at the special screening of "Christine," much of the drama centered in the projection room. Sitting behind me were the parents of John Hansen, the 18-year-old blond boy and "discovery" making his screen debut in the starring role of Christine.

The Hansen Srs. are charming, youthful "folks." He is a prosperous insurance man.

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She is the pretty blonde mother of a family of four boys and one daughter. They give the impression of belonging to President Nixon's silent majority. Nice people.

All though the amazing performance given by their son, even to the clinical close-ups of breast development on his body following the operation, I couldn't help being conscious of the presence of the parents.

When the lights went up, there were tears in Mrs. Hansen's eyes. Her husband was obviously shaken. When I spoke to them, congratulating them on the performance of their next to eldest son, she said quietly, "It is the first time we have seen John's picture. It is an emotional experience for Dad and me."

"A shocking one?" inquired Irving Rapper.

"Not exactly. John had prepared us for many of the scenes so we were pretty well aware of what we would see.

I think mostly I feel surprise that my son who is such a fine athlete (champion swimmer among other sports) could bring such understanding to a role so far removed from his own life. I am, — touched. I think he is a very good actor," she said with pride, eyes still wet.

More thoughts on "Christine": Smart casting on the part of Eddie Small and Rapper to cast even the bigger roles with unfamiliar faces — including two extraordinarily good actors, Rod McCary, playing the part of the homosexual, Jess. And Quinn Redeker, an interesting Gregory Peck type playing the top magazine writer covering Christine's case . . .

Moss Mabry's clothes, designed for the women in the cast, Joan Tompkins, Ellen Clark, and Christine (after female transition) are all-mid calf, the length worn in the fashion world at the time of Christine Jorgensen's transformation. Designer Mabry's clothes look new and longue, particularly a stunning black dress worn by young Hansen.

That's it for today.