

# 'The Christine Jorgensen Story'

by Donald Cragin

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The Forum Room in the basement of Copley Square's handsome Sheraton Plaza Hotel was about 20 degrees cooler than the scorching pavement outside. About a dozen members of the working press, and a few others, were waiting for Christine Jorgensen, in Boston to tout the new United Artists film, "The Christine Jorgensen Story," based on her autobiography.

The conversation was not the usual buzz of greetings and social chatter, but was more subdued, barely a murmur. Several people have expressed wonderment over what their feelings and reactions would be on meeting Miss Jorgensen. A series of newspaper headlines rippled through the mind, "Bronx GI Becomes a Woman." "Dear Mom and Dad, Son Wrote, I Have Now Become Your Daughter." "Experts Question Validity of Sex Change Story." "Jorgensen Banned From Appearing At Boston's Latin Quarter." "Miss Jorgensen Authentic, Is Engaged." "Engagement Broken, Ring Kept."

Without fanfare, the door opened, and several people entered. A stately woman, blonde, dressed in sleeveless pink dress, with neither a minimum nor maximum of jewelry, entered, went to the nearest person, and introduced herself. "Hello, I'm Christine Jorgensen. How are you?" She moved quickly through the guests, introducing herself with a firm handshake, good eye contact, as the Dale Carnegie course might have noted, and at times commented on the hot weather and other trivialities.

Miss Jorgensen quickly put most everyone at ease. She had apparently realized that a demure wallflower act would not work, and as the luncheon-conversation later proved, she's actually a pleasant, gabby good-natured woman. The sort of woman one might spend an afternoon and evening drinking with, gossiping, joking, and listening to. An Irish friend, had he been there, would have summed it up by saying, "She's all right, she's a good broad."

Ordering a scotch whisky, she sat down at a small cocktail table, and everyone moved in. Conversation was a bit slow in getting started, as no one quite knew where the lines of discussion were to be drawn. As it turned out, there were none at all.

"The film recaptures about 99 percent of the emotions I had regarding the change, my operation. The medical and technical aspects are actual and true, except the actual operations aren't shown. I had three separate operations. Today, at John Hopkins where a lot are done, it's done with one operation. When I had mine, it took two years from the start of the therapy to the time I left Copenhagen. But then, I was pretty much a first."

She was asked whether she felt people would compare her film story with "Myra Breckenridge." Miss Jorgensen bristled. "Myra-Myron was never a transsexual. Gore Vidal didn't know the problem. He knew his problem, but he didn't know mine." She sipped her scotch, lit another menthol cigarette and received



the warm laughter which punctuated her statements.

Asked about reaction to the film, she said, "The kids generally respect me for 'doing my own thing' which I did in my era. I suppose you might say I was at the beginning of the sexual revolution. Five years ago you couldn't have made this film, and today I hear criticism that the boat has passed. There have been some who feel it's too much a soap opera, but truth is always more dramatic than fiction, don't you think?"

"My agent submitted the book to everyone, and Edward Small called with-

in five days. He's one of the great old time film producers; remember 'Count of Monte Cristo,' 'Last of the Mohicans,' 'Man In The Iron Mask,' and 'Red River?' He's done great films, but nothing of this era. He has done controversial films, such as 'My Son, My Son' which was about illegitimacy. He's old now, and talks of retiring, but every night after I return from meeting the press on this tour, I have to call him and give him a report."

"I was very concerned with who would direct, and I felt Irving Rapper was the man. He directed a lot of Bette Davis films, and I wanted a woman's director.

Remember his 'Now Voyager,' 'The Corn Is Green,' 'The Glass Menagerie'? I felt the director should be a man who was primarily a woman's director, and Irving was perfect."

She interrupted a question from a young man with a laugh. "I know just what you're going to ask. I can always tell. You're going to ask me what is my stand on Women's Liberation, right?" The man acknowledged she was right, and the women present leaned forward. "I've never considered myself a non-liberated woman. I feel they are correct when women are being paid less for the same job a man is doing, but I feel liberated, personally."

In the film, which opens Friday at the Gary Theater, newcomer John Hansen portrays George-Christine. A former member of Disneyland's youth choir, the 'Kids of the Kingdom,' Hansen plays both roles. Miss Jorgensen said she felt it would have to be one person, and not a female impersonating a male, as the largest amount of the film concerns her as George. Hansen and she got along splendidly, and she said of him, "Johnny is a nice adjusted young man. You have to be a little cracked to be an actor, I guess that's why actresses can only successfully marry doctors, because they understand them best."

"Johnny has found the role has given him money, and status. He now has a motorcycle, his girl friend has competition, and he wears a kangaroo bike jacket. Billy Wilder, who's very nasty, asked him if he was homosexual. Johnny won't take any of that, and calmly asked Wilder if he had seen the film. Wilder admitted he hadn't, and Johnny said he'd send a print over." Christine smiled, and everyone got up and moved over to the circular dining table, set with cold cups of vichyssoise.

The conversation then settled into women talk, with three male reporters looking at their plates and each other, while Miss Jorgensen and five women discussed her personal life. As everyone cut into the mixed grill, Miss Jorgensen ripped into a lamb chop as she discussed the possibilities of transplanting a uterus in future trans-sexual operations, after the rejection factor is overcome. The three men rejected the lamb-chop, and looked over toward the bar.

By now Miss Jorgensen had become quite chummy, and added "I use a wiglet. I have long blonde hair, which I keep up, and use a wiglet for early morning make-up. I'd sooner give up my dishwasher than give up my wiglets." She continued answering questions about fashions, "I feel a woman should wear what looks good. Joan Crawford does, and I feel the same way." And to a query about marriage, "Let's just say I'm not running toward it or away from it. The older I get (she's 44) the more of a readjustment in my life I'd have to make. I've been engaged twice, but never married."

Finally a woman asked the question which had apparently been on her mind for some time. "Of course, dear," Miss Jorgensen answered, "there'd have been no point to the operation otherwise, would there? That makes it all worth while, doesn't it?"