

# MOIRA



by EDWARD Z. EPSTEIN

"Do it," she told herself. "Do it." She'd arrived at the decision after much soul-searching and angst. She was standing on the Pont Royal, in Paris, one of the dozens of bridges spanning the Seine. The little steamboats, bateaux mouches, passed below. The myriad of stars that had given life to the black sky vanished. Moira hesitated a moment longer, then took her skates and tossed them into the murky waters. It was a gesture of frustration and desperation, for she'd reached a turning point. From that moment, she focused on bringing to life a concept, an idea that had taken root in her mind.

Moira's curiosity about life and her sense of adventure had propelled her on a fascinating journey during the turbulent nineteen-seventies. A graduate of the University of British Columbia, with an honors degree in English Lit and Theater, she also studied at the University of Strasbourg, France.

But her passion was figure skating — she was a Canadian Ice Dance Gold Medalist. She launched a career as a company member of "Holiday on Ice" and "Ice Follies," touring the world. "It was a world unto itself, exciting and unpredictable, the relationships, the rivalries, the friendships — an education on all levels. But I knew, at a certain point, that it definitely wasn't what I wanted to do with my skating for the rest of my life. Participating in 'commercial entertainment' was not my *raison d'être*. In those days, there were absolutely no other choices — there wasn't anything else to do with one's skating! You either competed as an athlete, aiming for a National or World or Olympic title, then turned professional and toured with a show. None of it set my imagination on fire, and I knew I'd have to pursue other options. Not in a million years did I imagine that I'd come up with an alternate venue. And it didn't exactly happen overnight!"

In fact, it didn't happen until 1984. That was the year, coincidentally, that she competed in, and won, with partner Patrick Dean, the Free Dance Competition in the 1984 World Professional Championships in Jaca, Spain. (Marc Bogaerts choreographed the program.) But the watershed event in her life that year was the creation of Ice Theatre of New York.

I was there — and there was absolutely no fanfare, no publicity, no frills. Moira and the founding members of the Company toiled away in the wee hours in the freezing cold Sky Rink on West 33rd Street in Manhattan. Ice time at a respectable hour was not affordable, and everyone was holding down day jobs. But the dedication, excitement and sense of purpose were palpable.

What is Moira really like? Quite simply, she's a woman with Star Quality. She'd be the last to subscribe to such a notion, being an ardent believer in the motto, "Credit

you give yourself isn't worth having."

But a star she is. It begins with her appearance — the sleek jet hair, the penetrating, mesmerizing hazel-green eyes, the high cheekbones, the musical voice. But those are merely physical assets — she's not a phony, she's fun and her sensitivity to one's feelings and thoughts is consistently on target.

People she believes in can attest to the intensity and sincerity of her enthusiasm, intelligence and energy. She's nobody's fool, however, and doesn't suffer fools gladly. Woe to the individual who underes-

timates her.

She's a connoisseur of talent, possessing an innate sense of how to nurture and deal with it. "It ain't easy," as humorist/author/critic/actor Robert Benchley once observed, having done battle with the best.

Moira manages it all with style and a sense of humor, including a rewarding personal life (husband Jay Colton is a noted photo journalist, and they have a son, Christopher). One assumes that Moira has maintained her sense of humor over the years, at least in part, in self-defense.

Charting new territory in any field is a

daunting challenge. Back in 1984, when Moira first asked me to contribute articles to Ice Theater's "Cutting Edge," I'd finally found an opportunity to write about a "forgotten" genius of the ice world, Belita. Interviewing legendary dancer/choreographer/actress Gwen Verdon about the skater (the women were contemporaries), Verdon made an observation that applied one-hundred-percent to Moira North: "It takes courage, guts and tunnel vision to be a pioneer in any field."

Moira has succeeded in establishing Ice Theatre of New York as a vital voice in the development of figure skating as a performing art. Last year, International Figure Skating Magazine named her one of the 25 most influential people in figure skating.

2004 is a milestone year for Ice Theatre, marking its 20th year in existence. It's been a long time since that evening in the seventies when Moira dropped her skates in the Seine (ever the optimist, she tried later to retrieve them!). Her journey continues, perhaps best summed up by the title of a classic popular song: "The best is yet to come..."

Edward Z. Epstein is author of twenty books, including "BORN TO SKATE: The Michelle Kwan Story" (Ballantine). He has appeared on the A&E Biography television series and the "E" channel on numerous occasions. His book subjects include Mia Farrow, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, Lucille Ball and Jennifer Jones. A dedicated figure skater and former Middle-Atlantic States Novice champion, his articles on figure skating have appeared in "Scandinavian Review" and New York's "Sunday News" magazine. He helped organize a festival of Sonja Henie's films for New York's Museum of Modern Art, and wrote the official museum notes for the series. He's worked with, and written articles on the lives of, among others, Natalie Wood and Ava Gardner. His play based on the life of Gardner has been optioned by producer David Brown. Mr. Epstein is a graduate of New York University.

