

KENNY MOIR: THE SKATER WITH FIVE MILLION FOLLOWERS

By Edward Z. Epstein



Kenny Moir has immortalized, for five million YouTube viewers to date, a memorable character-on-ice who has struck a universal chord. The affectionate, gently humorous video, notwithstanding its title — “Worst Skater Ever?” — “came from the heart,” notes Ken. When he first performed the ITNY piece, titled “In A Nutshell,” he received a standing ovation.

A co-production of ITNY and Improv Everywhere, the video depicts the plight of a beginning skater who tentatively, ultra-cautiously, stiffly but steadily, makes his way around the ice, sometimes clinging to the barrier, oblivious to other skaters, always moving forward, “like the bunny powered by the Eveready battery,” explains Ken. “And, believably, he very slowly but surely improves, big-time. It’s a triumph of the spirit!” Someone virtually everyone can identify with.

Ken, born in Vancouver, Canada, began skating “at the age of two-and-a-half, maybe three,” he recalls. “The skater in the video doesn’t represent my memories of what it was like learning how to skate. Not at all! Nor does it represent Rob McBrien’s [Rob was then ITNY’s artistic director].

“Rob’s inspiration for the piece came from the many students we’d [individually] observed and taught over the years. They all had, to varying degrees, one important thing in common, a thread that connected them: the determination to learn, improve and not give up.

“It takes courage to become

comfortable out there on the ice, doing something that doesn’t come naturally. Doubly difficult when you’re an adult just beginning to skate. Talk about having a late start!

“Rob thought it would be fun to create a ‘real’ character, taking him from can’t skate-to-great skater. We wanted the character in the video to capture all the errors beginners make, but without any hint of slapstick or a mocking attitude. We approached it with love and respect for the beginner.”

One might note that it takes a great skater to be able to believably portray someone who can’t skate.

It’s interesting that Ken’s father was a skating judge. “He had a poster on the wall, ‘The Rules of Cricket.’ You might ask, What does that have to do with skating? ‘The reason nobody follows cricket,’ Dad explained, ‘is because nobody can follow the rules. People can’t understand it.’ He felt, even before the 2002 Olympic scandal, that skating was on that path. ‘They’re going to ruin the sport,’ he said, ‘because people won’t feel they’re a part of the competition.’ My Dad was a very wise man.”

The YouTube video from Improv Everywhere and ITNY is a genuine coup-de-theatre, because the impact is so unexpected, straightforward and true. Not to mention deceptively “simple.” “Making it was anything but simple,” recalls Ken. “We filmed outdoors, at the Bryant Park rink, in the dead of winter, it was freezing cold. I had to





skate the routine many times. There were twenty still photographers clicking away, six to eight special cameras, twenty-seven tekkies hidden away, filming people's reactions. I realized later how those production people knew what they were doing, because the reactions they captured are memorable.

"But I also remember saying to Moira, 'This film is either going to be really awful or really good.' Moira said, 'It's going to be great!' It was fascinating to see how onlookers reacted, as they watched me — my character — getting better and better. Half the 'audience' were entertained, while the rest were very worried that 'he' — my character — was hurting himself!

"At one point, some policemen walked over to see if I was okay! 'Don't worry, officers,' I told them, 'I'm giving a performance!'"

It was a performance destined to be seen by millions, and, in its genre, the video has become a classic.

When, back in the eighties, Ken first arrived in New York from Vancouver, he skated in the ice show at Sheraton Center, produced by Paradise Productions, whom he subsequently worked for (also in the show was Stephanie Grosscup, tonight's other ITNY Alumni Award winner). Ken had been recommended by noted choreographer Sarah Kawahara, and has fond memories of the experience.

"I was very fortunate," says Moir, recalling those days. "My skating blossomed during the Janet Lynn period, I call it

the 'Golden Age of Skating.' I think we had more freedom back then. Today, there are so many contradictory rules. Piling up the most points is, unfortunately, what counts above all else. It's very frustrating for today's skaters," functioning in a world in which jumpers who skate seem more in demand than skaters who jump.

Ken, a newcomer to New York, was soon re-introduced to fellow Vancouverite Moira North, who in turn introduced him to the Skating School director at Sky Rink, an appropriately named rink located at 450 West 33rd Street. It took up the entire sixteenth floor of an office building.

"It was there I started teaching," recalls Ken, who loved to teach, "and never looked back." And he happily became, as he describes it, "part of that wonderful experiment known as ITNY."

He also subsequently became Skating Director at Sky Rink for over a decade, 2002-2012. The position required him, to his dismay, to cut back dramatically on his teaching. "I missed it, and couldn't wait to eventually get back to it."

He's back teaching, and enjoying every minute of it.

"It is fitting, indeed, that ITNY honors Ken with our Alumni Award this year," notes Moira North. "He has been a talented presence at ITNY since skating in 'There Is a Somebody,' by Rob McBrien, and in every ITNY performance thereafter for eight straight seasons. He's a special guy, and a true friend to our creative movement. My heartfelt congratulations on the award, Kenny!"