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**James Mavor Moore**  
**1919-2006**



James Mavor Moore was born in Toronto on March 8, 1919 and died in Victoria on December 18, 2006. A playwright, writer, actor, broadcaster, composer, critic, arts advocate and administrator, Moore was the very essence of theatre; indeed his life was devoted to Canadian culture. Author of more than 100 plays, documentaries, musicals and libretti for stage, radio and television, he appeared in more than 60 feature films and was a regular performer on stage, radio and television. He was First Production Chief for CBC-TV, founding Chair of the Canadian Theatre Centre, founding Director of the Charlottetown Festival and Toronto's St Lawrence Centre for the Arts. He served as first Chairman of the Guild of Canadian Playwrights, a Governor of the first Stratford Festival, a founding Governor of the National Theatre School, Advisor to the National Arts Centre, Theatre Calgary, Vancouver Playhouse and the Neptune Theatre. From 1979-1983 he was the first artist to become Head of the Canada Council. After moving to the West coast in 1984 he taught at the University of British Columbia, was a board member of Vancouver's Committee on Race Relations, served as Co-chair of the World Conference on Arts, Business and Politics at Expo in 1986 and was founding Chair of the B.C. Arts Council from 1996-1998.

As a member of the Departments of English and Theatre at York University from 1970 to 1984 and Research Professor at the Universities of Lethbridge and Victoria from 1985 until his death, he was an inspiring teacher, working in the new field of Canadian theatre history, planning conferences and inciting interest in the past while encouraging writers into the present. Always supportive, he was a superb listener, instilling confidence where it was needed while implying that he was the one seeking advice. For Mavor believed, like his grandfather the political economist James Mavor, "That co-operative species survive best". Like his indomitable mother, the producer/director Dora Mavor Moore, with whom he founded the New Play Society in 1946, he was adept at suggesting the many ways co-operation could be achieved.

An early established motto (openly stolen from Robert Browning) sets the scene: "The first rule of art is to get it DONE. Who pays for it hardly matters as long as SOMEBODY does". As a boy actor in the newly established Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation he acknowledged, "We were learning to fly by inventing the rules as we went and racing to improve them before they hardened into rulers...this early experience convinced me that the most exciting challenge in life is to break new ground". It is not surprising that early on he recognized that CBC Radio was Canada's first national theatre. If, as he told his students, "Tomorrow's reality depends on what you do with today's", *carpe diem* for Mavor must always be with a Canadian slant. Find new uses for broadcasting, new forms of art, encourage new artists, whatever you do, create change! Never stand still, for therein lies the risk of stagnation.

It was inevitable that he should become not only a practising artist, but a critic of both art and the institutions that should be creating it. His production of the legendary review *Spring Thaw* had mocked institutions, public figures, political agenda and local affairs. One of his earliest successes as a Director for the New Play Society was Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, that tragicomedy ruminating on morality, class, invention, government, self-reliance and providence. Was it prescience that he himself should become another Captain Shotover, the endlessly inventive sea captain who refused to abandon himself to "the happiness of yielding and dreaming instead of resisting and doing"? "Navigation", commands the eighty-year old mariner. "Learn it and live; or leave it and be damned." With a similar pragmatic approach to life, Mavor too constantly reminded us that our business is navigation.

For the arts, navigation requires freedom from both governmental and commercial tyranny. Ever the iconoclast, nobody and no institution was spared his clear-eyed vision of and for the future. As a critic himself – for the *Canadian Commentator* (1956-57), *Toronto Telegram* (1959-60), and the *Globe and Mail* (1984-89), he spared nobody – other critics, politicians both in and out of office, bureaucrats and administrators; all must be reminded of their priorities. Uncomfortable with orthodoxy, persistently inventing the future (and reinventing himself), both subversively and openly challenging institutions and public (sometimes private) individuals, when he himself became an administrator he was as independent as he was as an artist. How many of us have sat, squirming with helpless acknowledgement, while at podium or microphone he castigated the public and its leaders for a tunnel vision that “mistakenly imposes economic and political mind-set on issues that require cultural solutions.” Government and politics must wait on and serve culture, not the other way round. “What price *multiculture* if *culture* fails?” For Moore there was always hope as long as there were workers, of which he was tirelessly one.

Always restless, Moore served as a psychological warfare officer in Canadian Army Intelligence, and was then seconded to the CBC’s international service. But in the 1940s he also worked in the information division of the United Nations Secretariat in New York and the UNESCO seminar on education, writing and directing documentaries, three of which won Peabody Awards in 1947, 1949, and 1957. But Canada and Canadian culture remained at the heart of his ambitions. He later wrote: “What kept me coming back to Toronto was the belief that in Canada we had a rare chance to develop, out of the eye of the storm, new uses for broadcasting and new forms of art free of both governmental and commercial tyranny. At the same time it was the challenge of effecting changes in the larger sphere that drew me to the United Nations again and again.” Mavor Moore did much to make that happen.

Moore was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1973 and elevated to Companion in 1988. Among his other awards were ACTRA’s John Drainie Award for lifetime service to broadcasting (1982), the Diplôme d’honneur from the Canadian Conference of the Arts (1985), the Canada Council’s Molson Prize (1986), the Warner-Lambert Award in Arts Administration (1989), the Order of British Columbia (1999), the Governor General’s Award for lifetime achievement in the performing arts (1999), and numerous honorary degrees. In 2006 he was one of the first inductees into the newly-established Arts Division of the Academy of the Arts and Humanities of the Royal Society of Canada.

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*(Author’s title given as of the time of writing)*