

THOM CHRISTOPHER

WENDY GRAHAM INTERVIEWS THE HAWK MAN FROM
BUCK ROGERS FOR SPACE VOYAGER



High heels, black tights and feathers seems to be a strange recipe for fame – especially when worn by a man, but when the occupant of the costume was Thom Christopher the effect was magical.

Thom is one of those rare people who is endowed with more than his fair share of charisma, and that, together with his great talent as an actor turned what could have been cartoon character time at Buck Rogers into a performance which has firmly etched itself into many people's memories.

He is also to be envied as an actor in that he is much in demand – he walked straight out of the movie studio after doing an episode of T J Hooker to the airport to fly to Empathicon in Liverpool where we talked before he went on to London and then back to the States to take on more parts.

Thom is a delightful person to interview, with a compelling ability to focus intently on the person to whom he is talking. His enthusiasm for his work and life makes most people seem lethargic and dull. He is a voracious reader and when time permits a keen attendee of theatre and cinema.

'As soon as I get a pay cheque I'm off to the bookshop or the record shop spending. At our New York home we have two rooms just full of books and records. I even read while I'm watching TV.'

'My favourite reading material is biographies and theatrical history and science fiction.'

'When I was younger, in my early twenties, say, I read much more fiction, but now, as I get older, I find I have a thirst for knowledge which leads me much more to factual books.'

'It was coming to conventions which introduced me to the world of SF. I feel so honoured to be sitting with Anne (McCaffrey).'

His interest in SF and friendship with Anne has led Thom to start thinking of creative

writing himself and to hope for a directing assignment soon.

'I keep on dropping hints in the right ears and hoping,' he said. 'I would absolutely love to see the *Ship Who Sang* produced and oh for a chance to direct it.'

Thom had always wanted to be an actor even as a very young child. 'I can't remember a time when I didn't want to go on the stage. My mother was incredibly supportive, even though my background was against going into something like that. I took dancing lessons right from being very young and went to the New York School For The Performing Arts – the *Fame* school.'

'Where I grew up in New York – I'm an Italian Yiddish Gentile New Yorker (!) – I was a sort of gentle gopher for the orthodox jews of the neighbourhood – I used to run all their errands for them on their sabbath – 25 cents to turn on a light and so on. I did that from about age seven to 12.'

'I worked hard at my dancing lessons and I've done dancing and musicals on stage since. I try to keep fit, I'm very body oriented, I jog, play racketball, swim and try to keep agile.'

Thom put much of this energy into the part of Hawk.

'Buck Rogers was a season and a half flop really.' 'Hawk was only in for 13 weeks and had only three big shows to make an effect. I did the job, played the part to the best of my ability – and it was a marvellous part – and then was very pleased when I learned that people had been moved by it.

'And when I got the first invitation to a convention I reacted 'Me! Why!?', but I went along and loved it. The feedback was wonderful. I had tried to make the bird man real – and what a concept to make real.'

'And now the fans at conventions know me as Thom as much as they do as Hawk, which is good because acting is ephemeral, a crazy profession.'

Thom's hero in life is Lawrence of Arabia. He has devoured every book available on the man and once sat for four hours in our National Portrait Gallery staring at the painting of him.

'And I've seen the Peter O'Toole film 43 times! I've been haunted by Lawrence for years and since I first saw the film 20-odd years ago I've always thought it the most perfect film ever made.'

Our interview closed with Thom passing on a quotation which he holds in high regard and to which he aspires:

'Whatever is created subconsciously is accompanied by a discharge of energy which has an infecting quality. This ability, the subconscious carrying over of the subconscious to the spectator is a characteristic of talent. Whoever perceives subconsciously and subconsciously expresses it, that one is a genius.'

And as a footnote, Thom was going to London to talk about a part which would have kept him and his lovely wife Judith in this country for 35 weeks and promised he would ring and let me know how negotiations turned out. Actors are notoriously bad at making promised phone calls, but Thom rang (though the deal didn't work out).