

# Forgotten London-Born Hollywood Film Pioneer Gets His Due in New Book

*A long-forgotten Hollywood film pioneer from London is the subject of a new book by Western University lecturer Mark Kearney.*

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Western University lecturer Mark Kearney holds a copy of his new book about Al Christie, a long-forgotten film pioneer from London. His biography, *Al Christie: Hollywood's Forgotten Film Pioneer*, is available for purchase on Amazon. (Calvi Leon/The London Free Press)

Al Christie? Exactly.

The long-forgotten Hollywood film pioneer from London is the subject of a new book by Western University lecturer Mark Kearney.

The biography sheds light on the 30-year career of Christie, who grew up in London before making the first comedy film in Hollywood in 1911, said Kearney, a writer and former Free Press reporter from 1977-80.

“He made his mark in Hollywood,” he said. “He was very well known at the time, well respected, and a very prolific producer and director. And how come we don’t know about him?”

Kearney discovered Christie by fluke in the late 1990s. He was browsing through books in Western's D.B. Weldon library when he stumbled upon London-born film director John Robertson.

"I started researching him. Then, a few years later, somewhere along the line, I came across Al Christie's name," Kearney said.

He changed gears and started looking into Christie, pulling all he could from the limited information about the forgotten Londoner.

During the next 20 years, when Kearney wasn't teaching or co-writing his 11 books, he'd interview historians, dig up archives, visit museums and even interview some of Christie's relatives to help him put the pieces together.

On one of his trips to California, Kearney stopped at a silent film museum outside San Francisco that had 40 of Christie's films on reels. "I spent the day watching these movies and taking notes," he said.

Christie was born to a London police officer, George Christie, and his wife Mary, in 1881, two years after his brother. After George died, the boys began working in 1898 to support their mother. Christie's jobs included a stint as a stagehand at the Grand Theatre.

Christie, who left London around 1909, was the first person to make comedy films in Hollywood in 1911. Besides sunshine and fruit trees, the town didn't have much going for it back then, Kearney said.

Shortly after Christie and his crew at Nestor Film Co. arrived, they bought an old tavern on Sunset Boulevard and converted it into a studio, he said. "Two days later, they were making films."

Christie, who started a production company with his brother, went on to make hundreds of comedy shorts and other films.

"He was prolific over the course of 20 to 30 years," Kearney said. "Silent film buffs know him, but the average population had no idea."



**Al Christie**  
Hollywood's Forgotten  
FILM PIONEER  
by Mark Kearney

There are a few reasons Christie never received proper recognition, one of them being that many of his films simply don't exist anymore, Kearney said. "They're hard to find."

Some suspect he never soaked in the spotlight because his films either weren't considered as good or didn't "age as well" as others, Kearney said. Others believe Christie didn't live long enough to receive the recognition he deserved.

He died in 1951, before a resurgence of interest in silent films. Suddenly, people started praising actors and directors such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, Kearney said.

"But Christie wasn't around at the time. So, there wasn't anybody there to say, 'What about this guy?'"

Perhaps one of the most interesting bits of information Kearney learned about Christie was that his daughter died at age 10 in a horseback riding mishap.

"He never talked about it. Some people never even knew he had a daughter," he said.

Kearney's book, *Al Christie: Hollywood's Forgotten Film Pioneer*, was published last month by Bear Manor Media and is available on Amazon.

Kearney said plans are in the works to get the book into stores, with a book signing in the future.

Reflecting on his biography of Christie, 20 years later, Kearney described the writing process as a rewarding experience.

"I wanted to tell this guy's story in book form, and let people know about him. And here it is."

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