



"Love, Simon" Star Clark Moore on the Lack of Diversity When it Comes to Gay Roles and Getting to Act Out His High School Fantasy

Love, *Simon* star Clark Moore's proud to play a character that's more than just a punchline.

The actor plays Ethan in the teenage rom-com, the only person out at the high school while the titular Simon (Nick Robinson) struggles with telling those closest to him about his sexuality even though he lives amongst open-minded people like his liberal parents and besties Leah, Nick, and Abby. While Simon is anxious about coming to terms with his identity, Ethan is unabashedly himself. The teen is incredibly sharp-tongued and chock full of witty one-liners. Whenever bullies try and take cheap shots at him for being gay, he always hits back harder telling them off with hilarious rebuttals.

Teen Vogue spoke to Clark about playing Ethan in *Love, Simon*, his career journey, the importance of representation in film, and why he wants to see more LGBTQ-identifying actors playing queer roles.

***Teen Vogue:* How did you get your start as an actor?**

Clark Moore: I started acting when I was seven in Atlanta. I went to a performing arts camp per the suggestion of my older cousin, who's now a film producer in New York. She was just sort of like, "I think you'd really like it. It's a sleep-away camp. You'll get a break." To my parents, she [was] like, "You guys will get a break from having to take care of him for the summer and I'll get to watch him." [So] I went there and I just fell in love with it. Through that one experience, I booked my first agent. It's been 20 years since then.

***TV:* What initially struck you about *Love, Simon* when you first learned about it?**

CM: Before I [thought about] what this could mean for the culture, for young gay kids or for my high school self, first and foremost I was just trying to book it. I didn't think I would because when I read the script, I was like, "God, this is so good and it's so of the moment." It just felt out of my reach. I felt like they would go with either a [big] name or they would go with someone who's white because historically, that's what's happened to me. I've gone in for these roles where it's the interesting gay character or the gay best friend, and they've always seen all ethnicities, but they almost always have gone with one of the white actors in the past.

"We're used to seeing strong black characters, especially if they're effeminate, [Ethan has] some depth added to his character, where he's not just the punchline," Clark tells *Teen Vogue*. "He has vulnerabilities just as much as anybody else." Not only does he provide not only comedic relief for viewers but he's also a source of inspiration for young people nervous about being accepted by others.

***TV:* Why do you think that's the case?**

CM: When you drive around LA, unlike any other city, there are billboards everywhere. The city is plastered with this television [show] for your consideration or this movie. There's so much saturation of billboard advertisement that they even turn sides of skyscrapers into billboards just because they're like, "Let's make as much noise about these shows as possible." All that to say, when you're driving around, you see what marketing is thinking and what the networks are thinking when they're deciding who's gonna be their main characters. They're thinking about whose face can be on the side of a building on Sunset Boulevard and [or] selling [something like] a Marvel superhero movie in a believable way. For whatever reason, we still don't think that Thor could be played by a gay guy.

TV: Why do you think big studios have been so hesitant to make movies centered on the LGBTQ experience?

CM: Historically, I think the reason why there haven't been more gay roles or more gay actors playing roles that have lots of layers to them and lots of depths to them is because for whatever reason, people think that the story is done. We've seen the gay character. We know what he says. We know what he thinks. We don't need to tell that story anymore, but if you think about it, we've had a full canon of stories about straight white men that stretch back millennia, and so we're only scratching the surface. If we can have stories about people all the way back thousands of years ago and we can still be telling the same story now about straight white men and their journey to self-discovery or redemption, there's plenty of stories to tell of people of color and LGBTQ people and anybody who falls in the intersection of those two identities.

TV: What did you love most about playing Ethan?

CM: I love that I got to sort of act out my high school fantasy. Ethan is sort of who I wish I was in high school. He's way cooler than I ever was. He's also probably who I thought I was. He's what I was aiming for in high school, and now that I got to play him and I look back on my adolescent experience, I'm sort of like, "Wow, you are way off there, Clark." On top of that, our costume designer for this movie is the same costume designer who did *Gossip Girl*. That was also amazing because *Gossip Girl* was sort of a seminal TV show experience before we had *Riverdale*. I remember when I first spoke to him, I was like, "I want to be as hyper-feminine as possible." I sort of described Ethan to him as being a kid who regularly binges *Gossip Girl* on Netflix. He's a couple years behind the show, but he's still very much in that world and very much trying to emulate that world. [So] it was the costumes and also being able to be sassy.

TV: In recent years, while there have been a handful of successful films in with a lead from the the LGBTQ community, most of those characters were played by straight men. As someone who openly gay who has played a gay teenager, does that bother you?

CM: For me, it's less about straight actors playing gay roles. My resentment towards it comes from the lack of diversity amongst gay roles. Like for instance Nick, our main actor who plays Simon is great and every time I've seen the movie, I just can't imagine anyone else doing it. He's just such a good and talented actor.



The thing that frustrates me is the way we view sexuality [and] masculinity within our culture. We're okay with straight guys playing gay, but it's very rare that you see gay men portraying straight roles. We, as a culture, don't forgive femininity in men. We can suspend our disbelief long enough to believe that this straight actor is gay for the hour and a half of this movie, but for whatever reason, we're still incapable of doing the reverse. I would like to see the reverse happening more. I just really want actors to be able to work in any roles — just give it to the best actor for the role.

TV: What do you hope people that go to watch *Love, Simon* take away from the experience?

CM: What I hope people take away from it is what I take away from it, which is that no matter what your experience is, no matter how supportive your environment, [or] no matter how privileged you are, it's still very hard to come to terms with your identity when it doesn't match the identity that other people perceive you to have. I hope that this movie creates a safe space for those people where it doesn't have to feel awkward or uncomfortable talking about these things that historically have been shameful. A lot of the emotions that I went through and a lot of the angst, the residual angst that I had from my coming out experience were processed in watching this film and especially in being able to watch it with my mother. [It] helped me process a lot of that and helped me understand all of the love and all of the support that I really have from my family. I hope it helps other people process [that] too.