

An Interview by Don Wigal

Mr. Shatner was in New York City for only a few hours in order to tape the television show SHOOT FOR THE STARS (NBC). But he gave ALL ABOUT STAR TREK FAN CLUBS every available moment to be questioned and to let you readers know of his various projects. He could not have been more gracious and cooperative, in spite of his busy schedule. The taping of the TV show seemed to be no bother to Mr. Shatner; the persistent calls for makeup, curtain call, new wardrobe, getting a cab to the airport, saying goodbye to friends, the agent signing legal papers in the hallway—all seemed to be less concern to him than telling you of his many and exciting ideas.

The day before, we gave Mr. Shatner a copy of our issue (June) which was dedicated to him. It was pleasantly surprising to receive a call the next morning saying that we could come over for a few minutes for an interview. Mr. Shatner allowed us these "few minutes" for three hours that afternoon.

We met first in his dressing room before he taped the quiz show. After taping we met backstage for another half hour as a helpful aide tried to hail a cab to the airport.

Mr. Shatner was even willing for us to continue the interview in the cab on the way to the airport, but we thought he deserved at least some privacy in his busy schedule.

The interview took place in the Ed Sullivan Theatre on Broadway. Across the street a billboard proclaimed that Leonard Nimoy was to soon appear in Equus. Moreover, George (SuLu) Takei was in town for the Mini Star Trek Con. III which was the next day. The Enterprise crew had invaded Manhattan!

Also appearing on the quiz show was Deborahlee Scott who played Cathy on MARY HARTMAN, MARY HARTMAN. Backstage, after the taping, Bill gave Deborahlee an affectionate goodbye which would be the envy of every lady Shatner fan. (Sorry, no cameras were allowed.)

There was only one mention of Star Trek in the quiz show and that was an answer to a question addressed to Bill. When the answer appeared to be the words "Star Trek", Bill simply said "these actors are very clever." Otherwise, Mr. Shatner was introduced as a busy actor and producer of the various projects he mentions in the following interview.

Finally, we should add that Mr. Shatner looked great. The photographer was Doug Drexler who writes the Trivia Quiz in the Star Trek Poster Book. Also present during the interview was Ron Barlow, publisher of the Poster Book and brainchild behind the Federation Trading Post in Manhattan. On very short notice (30 minutes), Ron arranged for Doug to do our photography, and he did an admirable job.

(Continued on next page)

WS: For years, I have not paid much attention to fan clubs. It was too much trouble for me to go then. Now I realize I made a mistake. I would like to know who they are, in order to reach them. The film companies for whom I have just done a film called "Kingdom of the Spiders" wanted to get in touch with the fans and fan clubs, and I said I didn't know how to. Now here is a way, through your magazine.

Also, I have now my own record called "William Shatner Live." I'm mail ordering it myself. So I too have a vested interest in

reaching the fans.

DW: This is the way to do it.

WS: Right, so I'm glad I took the opportunity to meet you while I was here and express my appreciation for this painting on the cover (June issue) and tell you that I'm actively, now, looking for those people that I've ignored all the years.

DW: Wonderful.

WS: It's good for two reasons. First, producers say to me "we've hired you, now who's going to see you?" Secondly, I really



WS

have made an error, and am paying people to help me rectify it.

DW: No one's aware of the error. You have lots of fans out there. I tried to call the president of your club this morning, when you graciously allowed us to see you. You know the president of your fan club is getting married soon. I wish she could be here.

WS: Yes, I know. So the whole purpose of us meeting is an expression of appreciation, for that June issue. And also, is there any way that I can now bring you to full attention of what I'm

attempting to do?

DW: Definitely.

WS: Well, that's fantastic. I have a great deal to tell then about what I've done, and what I'm about to do.

First, I'm starting a new show. I just settled it yesterday with the author. I went to him several weeks ago. Robert Silverberg. Do you know the name?

DW: Yes. Science fiction writer.

WS: Yes. He's tops, first rate for the job. And I'm going to do a show. I'll tour it this Spring,



WS



and it'll probably be mine for some time to come. Basically, it is about what science fiction thinks the future will be. And I'll dramatize it.

DW: Fantastic.

WS: So in the meantime, I'd like to tell your readers my plans for that. Also, there is the movie that's coming out in the middle of the summer. Thirdly, there is a special record that I made. It is special to me and should be special to your readers.

DW: You know, they aren't just Kirk fans. I mean, they are Shatner fans.

WS: Well, it's interesting you should say that. Because that's the line I've had to draw—

DW: You've probably been tempted to write a book, "I Am Not Kirk."

WS: Well, no. I've been tempted to write a book, "I Am Kirk." Because I don't wish to deny that. In fact, some of the reporters have been somewhat ascerbic—when they ask if I think I am Captain Kirk? And I say well, I am. I played the part. But what I have to say is something along the lines that Captain Kirk and Shatner would say in this one man show. There is a special thing that happened between me and the audience—most of the time was when I did Star Trek. The album reflects that. Both Kirk and Shatner are in performance. This record album is really exciting to hear, from a number of points of view.

At this moment there are people from 20th Century Fox attempting to sell a half hour series called "Breakaway," of which I made six half hours. It involves sports—things people do to "break away" for the weekend, or break away from their jobs. And we've done six half hours now. And it looks very promising, that it will be a syndicated, half hour sports-oriented show.

DW: So it's kind of "In Search Of Vacations."

WS: Right. "Where Every Man Has Gone Before." Then, there is a play which I'll be doing—Sidney Michaels' "Tricks of the Trade", here in the summer. And—(to his agent) do we know where?

Agent: Westport, Conn.

WS: It's a two character show and a comedy-mystery, or rather a mystery-comedy. The cast is Yvette Mimieux and myself. It may run for the four weeks of August, around the New York area. The idea is to prepare for Broadway, and I have an option to go to Broadway at the particular time when I want to. So it gives me quite a lot of freedom. And there's a movie coming up . . . No, not *that* one! This one is called "Kingdom of the Spiders."

DW: Is the film being done by a studio, or independently?

WS: It's independent. I think the film will be fun. People will have a good time as they see it. It's not going to be the great art work of the year. But it will be a fun motion picture. You should get the daylights scared out of you.

DW: I hope you don't mind us quoting (in our June issue) that you didn't think much of "Devil's Rain."

WS: I certainly didn't. You can quote me again.

DW: I did mention in the magazine that a lot of fans didn't think it was really that poor a film in that genre.

WS: Right. But I think "Kingdom of the Spiders" might be a little, minor classic in that genre. If you keep within those confines. I think it will be worth seeing. I certainly had fun doing it.

DW: What about your other new ventures?

WS: Robert Silverberg is perhaps the best of the next echelon of the science fiction writers after Asimov, Bradbury, and all. He's next best. In fact I think the wave of youngish writers coming up are led by Silverberg. He and I have agreed to do a show together. He's going to write it, and I'll be performing. I have high hopes. The previous show that I did and I took out to a number of colleges was called "An Evening with William Shatner."

DW: We covered it when you were at Hofstra University.

WS: It was kind of a potpourri of dramatic things with the general category of where science fiction began. The Greeks, and the classical writers, Rostand (who wrote about seven ways to get to the moon), and Galileo, (talking about how we're no longer the center of the universe). We have the freedom to go anywhere with that kind of tour during the other half of the evening, I took questions and answers—provided anecdotes that I found amusing. And I had a good time with the audience. So the evening broke itself up into two segments, really. Straight and serious, and free and laughable. This is what I've put down on Ip's. I've hired the best talent to package it for me, including the jacket cover, a poster inside, a letter explaining what I was doing. Sondra Marshak and Myrna Culbreath wrote a preamble to it because they had seen the show and were very impressed by it. They're doing a book called "Shatner: Where No Man . . ."

DW: The book will be part of the package?

WS: No. The book will be coming out later

During the interview Don Wigal showed this promotional shot to Mr. Shatner. It was obvious that the wheels of his memory were going quickly through his file of performances and soon he gave a grin of recall and a knowing nod. The picture was promoting the 1964 OUTER LIMITS episode "Cold Hands, Warm Heart." In this scene an astronaut's hands have become scaled and webbed while orbitting through space. Two years after this ABC-TV show Mr. Shatner was to begin playing the role of another man in space; need we say that Captain Kirk had many similar challenges during the next three years?



Several captions have been suggested for this picture:

"Mr. Spock, how is that Vulcan salute done again?"

"Nurse Chapel, what is that shot you gave me?"

Bones says "You know that Klingon frog we had? Well he grew human hands and . . . he's dead, Jim."

on. It's somewhat autobiographical. It's a mixture of my own stuff that I have told them and their interpretation. Their comment is carried on the back. And there'll be an 8 by 10 glossy.

DW: You mean an 8 by 10 glossy newer than this one here? At this point we showed Mr. Shatner the OUTER LIMITS picture shown here with this interview.)

WS: Where the devil did you find that? I was so young. Audiences I've played to in the theatre, movies and television, have watched me grow up from a boy to whatever I am. I have been in communication with audiences on an

osmosis basis rather than on a verbal level. The record is really a recording of this event that took place. That's the reason I think it would be of interest to even more than the ST audience. It will be an event in our culture—because ST is very much a part of our culture.

I strive for eye contact with each audience in each performance in trying to reach them. And I can feel them. And I know they can feel me. And that's what's happening the two nights we recorded. We recorded it in two separate places. But mostly at Hofstra University, here in New York.

On those two nights there was a magic communication that is too rare in the theatre. And it's so palpable on the record that it's for me, from just that point of view, really exciting. And then the communication between the audience and myself in the second record. And that's what I'm about right now. In the movie, I really try to be myself. I was not trying to play a character. I went into this movie playing the guy who tries to save a town. I went into that movie again, with the foreknowledge that I wanted to be myself. That instead of performing a character—delineating a character—I wanted to see how I would have reacted in that situation. It had to do with millions of tarantulas that had decided to conquer the environment back again. And eventually I was covered with the tarantulas. But instead of being heroic about it, how would I, myself, be? How would I react to any one of these things crawling over me?

DW: Ugh!

WS: Your expression was exactly the way I played it. And so instead of playing the hero, instead of playing someone who is stronger and braver than I could be, myself, I tried to play him as myself. The same way that I had learned to be myself on stage and take the chance that in utterly being myself, and being absolutely naked in the nonprepared material, segment of the show, taking the chance that the audience would like me enough to accept me. That I might make mistakes and make Freudian slips, which I did frequently.

DW: You have another blooper reel possibility?

WS: Just about. Being yourself is taking a chance. For example, there was one conversation (Oakland) where there were ten thousand people in the audience. You go on, and you don't know what the next word out of your mouth will be. It's a dire mistake to try to think ahead. All you can do is let it come out and be confident—whether you have false confidence and psych yourself up, saying to yourself, "to

heck with it, they will like me". It's confidence built on past experience that the audience will accept you. They will like you, by being yourself.

DW: Each evening is like starting new again.

WS: Each evening there was a certain amount of terror involved. Because the material that I had was not strung together so that you could suspend disbelief, as you would in a play, or even in those one man shows where the people play characters. What I was doing was talking to them, and then bringing out a piece of prose that was totally out of context and trying to put it in a new context, and then going on and then finally spending a half an hour with them relating stories that I found amusing or answering as truthfully as I could some question that might go to the very heart of the matter. So that's the area that I love.

DW: It's very exciting.

WS: Yes, it is. I have a sense of growth and progression beyond anything I could have thought about, even up to a couple of years ago.

DW: That's fantastic.

WS: The name of the movie is "King of the Spiders." And it's a horror flic.

DW: I hope so, with that title.

WS: Right. (*A fly was bothering Mr. Shatner at this point. He didn't want to kill it but it was really being bothersome. Bill, speaking for the fly, said "Well, if you won't kill me, I'll attack you." This reflection on the nature of insects obviously reminded him of a related concern of his.*)

WS: I recently got enamoured with the conservation of whales and porpoises. I've seen a depth to that I've never seen before. I've read some books on it now and I've become consumed with the idea that we're killing this incredible being that lives in a different atmosphere, a different environment than we do. It's slaughter and genocide. For no other reason than profit. For the traditional reason, which is profit, is symbolic of what we have done to each other, since the beginning of time.

I've also been doing a lot of reading about anthropology, and I see, for example, that it is possible—the Cro Magnon man from which we sprung slaughtered the Neanderthal. We have been guilty of such atrocious crimes throughout our existence, and we're continuing to do it with what might very well be a magnificent intelligence. I never fully understood why scientists say that the whales and the porpoises might be more intelligent than us. Or at least in the range of a chimpanzee. But what further

study has produced for me is that the definition of intelligence is not exact. And they might very well have a way of thinking that is not at all like ours. Their whole reason for thinking is completely different. For example, they have no predators. Not until man came along. Their total sensory—way of sensing the world around them is totally different from ours. Ours is based primarily on gravity, and they do not have that. So those aspects, and many, many more can only lead us to a mystifying worship of this being that lives in the water. They have taught dolphins to speak, you know that? I mean, to actually say words.

Doug: I saw that on the TV Show "Nova" recently. It was really terrific.

WS: It's phenomenal what they have done. The size and complexity of their brain, could lead you to think the brains are of equal quality, if not better than ours. Much of their brain area leads directly to thought, whereas much of ours leads to motor reactions. So there's a great deal there that has not been explored, yet we're continuing to slaughter them. So again if for a cause of mine, stopping the destruction of those mammals in the water is very important.

DW: Fans often have benefits in your honor, as they do with Leonard Nimoy and the Alan Nimoy Memorial Fund. Are you active in a fund for conservation or ecology?

WS: Yes. And charities for children move me the most. And so anything to do with helping children—

DW: I see a similarity there, between the two. Both porpoises and children deal with the future.

WS: Right. There's a great deal of pessimism about children among the older people that I've come in contact with. And I suppose that life can lead you to that pessimism. But there is a great deal of pessimism among the young people themselves. You start as a child and the essence of childhood is optimism. The future is theirs.

DW: You have to be taught—

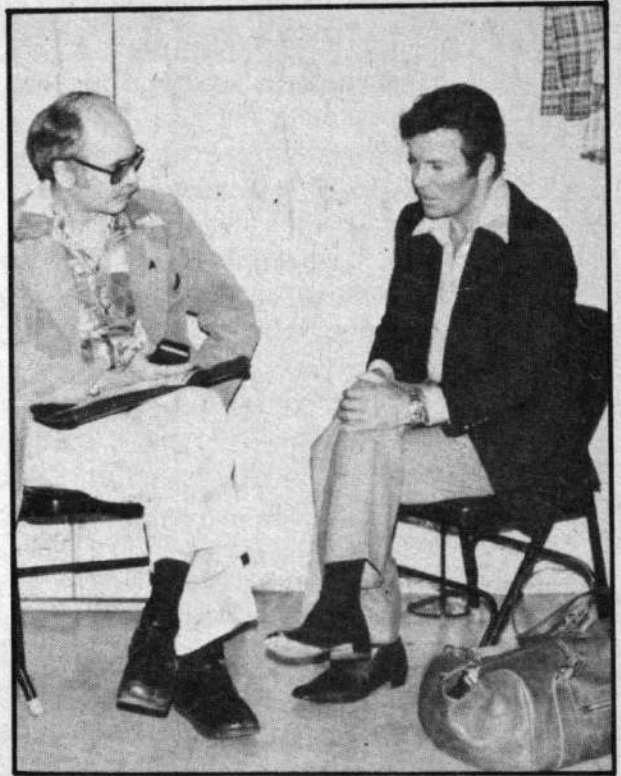
WS: —to be pessimistic. And here they are, already pessimistic. Where do they go?

DW: It's really frightening.

WS: Maybe we can do something about teaching them the possibilities of optimism.

DW: You've played so many roles that are hero roles and very optimistic. You are always doing something, solving problems.

WS: Well, you know, the essence of man's mind—the thing that has made man what he is today is his problem solving ability. It has led in some measure to affirmation. Problem solving



can work for our benefit, and it's essential that we learn that. Learn that we control those aspects of our brain which are into destruction, into death and pessimism. Those are words which—if one thinks without romance, without romanticism about life, one can see the hopelessness of life. You live, and you die, and there's nothing else. There's nothing there. And with this gift of seeing our own death—presumably we're the only animals that can—and with the gift of romance and seeing life from our center—and the world exists only in us—in our perception of it, so that when we die, most everybody's feeling is, the world ends.

DW: This is a whole side of WS that fans don't usually see. We're certainly aware of your awareness of science fiction, of course, and your awareness of comedy (doing some fantastic things like "Arsenic and Old Lace"). But fans will love to hear you in the albums and also on tour. This side of you. This dimension.

WS: I'm going to use these thoughts in the Bob Silverberg show. And I have great hopes for it. Because he and I have discussed this. There is an armageddon feeling about the world today. And that might very well be. But if you give yourself up to that, then it will happen. It's a self concluding thought. It will be inevitable. But we have survived so much, mankind. We have survived ice ages. We have survived drought—

DW: And that's just on *this* planet.

WS: And that's just on *this* planet. There are so many mysteries, and so many mysterious

things that we can't explain, that we'll never explain because there will be more mysteries. Deep, deep, profound mysteries. Like the black stars. Like time warps that have happened, that one can have different theories about, but no explanation. Like the meaning of life. It's such a mysterious thing. What people call God, or what the various religions attach a name to might just very well be the mysticism of what life is.

DW: With the many things you do, I bet people would be amazed that you still find time, obviously, to meditate and to be really in touch with existential things.

WS: I've discovered that my life has given me the freedom to ponder these things for myself. I have been gifted with the ability to be free of many of the travails that ordinary individuals would have. How to get cross town. It's not my problem, do you see?

DW: You can always beam across. (*Some concern for getting to the airport on time began to show up at this point.*)

WS: Right. I'm free of many of these mundane worries, I think for a reason. And that is to concentrate on the gift that is mine. And that's what I'm doing.

DW: One of many gifts.

WS: Well, thank you. But certainly the focus and I can reach out and touch some people's lives, perhaps.

DW: Thousands. If not millions. And of course the film will open it to millions more. (*At this time the Star Trek film was still a possibility.*)

WS: Well, the film is not terribly profound, but it is entertaining. But maybe we'll—I'll—be able to change that gradually.

DW: I'm sorry, I didn't mean "King of the Spiders." I meant *THE* film. It could open up new frontiers for Star Trek.

WS: Well, I hope so. There's so much going on with *that* film.

DW: Did you read any of the rejected scripts?

WS: No. I tell you what happened. And I do a number on the film on the record. There are about ten minutes about the film. In fact one whole side of the comedy section is on the film.

I had signed a contract with Paramount to be in the Star Trek film in 1976. I signed it the way I did because Paramount said there was a log jam, that Gene (Roddenberry) hadn't signed his contract, and Leonard (Nimoy) wasn't signing his, for reasons that are very valid. And they couldn't write a script until they had actors

because they wouldn't go through with the project unless they had the key people. So we worked out some of the figures, and I signed the contract. And they gave me some money for signing the contract. That was the situation when I was on tour. Well, the movie was supposed to have been started in the spring, 1977. That was what my contract called for. Otherwise, my contract had become like another option—it's called. And when the script came around, I was sent a notification saying that as far as Paramount was concerned, I could do what I want, whenever I wanted. They had no more hold on me. And if they made the movie, and they wanted to use me, they would call me. Which was rather insulting, I felt. And I had just had a series of meetings with the writers, and the director, and the producer.

DW: The writers at the time were two British fellows?

WS: The two fellows, yes. I've forgotten their names. So I had met them all, and discussed at great length what I felt about the character I play, and Leonard's and my relationships, and so as of this moment, I have been told by Paramount, forget it, we don't need you. *I have dropped the whole thing, and I don't want to be a part of it anymore.* It's foolish of me to even go through the process of waiting around, thinking about it, wondering what they're doing—

DW: So it was not just a matter of the spin-offs and the premiums and all of that.

WS: For whom?

DW: Well, for you.

WS: No. Not at all, I had signed the contract. The issue is, they don't want to have a contract with me. That's the issue.

DW: It's insane.

WS: That's right. That's right. That's the insanity that's going on there. No, I had agreed upon a figure then. *Now I'm so angry and hurt, really, that—let them come to me if they want to.* If they do, it will be my turn to do likewise. That's how angry I feel. So I've gone on to other things. When you say would I write a book, "I Am Not Kirk"—my feeling about ST is that I thought it was a great show. I did the best work I could on it. I'm very happy with many of the shows. I'm very proud of many of the shows that were on the air. And although in many people's minds I am linked with the character of Captain Kirk, I am also many other things. I was an actor for many years before ST and have done a lot of good work since ST. But I have never forgotten that the show was enormously beneficial to me. That I had a very good

time on it. And there are very few things in a person's lifetime that you point at and say, I'm proud of doing that. And especially an actor, in this kind of commercial market that we're in. Where there's such competition, by very good people, who are very popular. There's enough competition going around in show business. But for those cream of the crop things, which a few of us really want to do—I mean would really devote ourselves to doing, there's a great deal of competition. And one of those things was ST. ST came along, it was really a good thing. It's part of our culture. It's part of a cult. And I love it. I think it's terrific. And I don't deny the show. I don't, for thirty pieces of silver, deny it three times. I'm very happy with ST. I have appeared at conventions willingly, under the right conditions. I also know that Paramount has made an extraordinary amount of money on the show. I have participation in the profits of the show. And to this date they claim they have lost \$4 million on the show. *So I have not seen any money for seven years from Paramount.* Yet the people on the fringes of ST—have made a great deal of money on ST. And I, one of the main forces in the show, have not. So there is an element of resentment there, you see.

DW: So, they've lost \$4 million on it, yet they want to do another picture?

WS: It's a very confusing thing. And Paramount hasn't heard the last of it. So you can see how the anger and frustration might build up. Especially in view of this last fiasco. I was hesitant about talking about it before, and thought it best to keep it under wraps, and why should the audience at large know what the middle politics are inside the show. But unfortunately, that's what it is, now. For example, the embarrassment of going out and seeing 100,000 people, and during the course of talking to 100,000 people, every evening I was in the position to say yes, I've signed a contract, and the movie will be made. And now I'm in the position of saying "hey, I *did* have a contract". Because Paramount has released stories saying there's no contract with anybody. Well, that's true. But there *was*. So I feel myself in the position of having to defend my validity and my veracity to the fans.

DW: There's no Jeff Hunter around to take the Captain's role.

WS: No. I don't know what their intentions are, or where they're going. And at this moment, I feel the show is in the hands of people who don't know, and don't really care. With the exception of Gene.

Doug: I really don't know where he (Gene Rodenberry) gets the stamina to stick with it after all these years.

WS: Right? He's hung in there. I talked to him just before I left. And they were writing another script, and they hope—

DW: You say "they." Is he?

WS: No. They is the general They. The big T. I don't know when the quitting (of the screenwriters) took place but I know Bob Silverberg wrote a script for them two years ago, and it was turned down. There's a subjective line here that you must discriminate with. And that is that a writer who's spent seven months on a project has no objectivity. And when a head of a studio reads a script and thinks it's not very good—and this may or not be the case, I don't know—says well, I don't like this, really what he is saying is, I don't like the script. Nitpicking is one thing. They'll buy a script, and say, well, take out this moment here, put in that moment. That's their right. But if they absolutely discard the script after seven months and a lot of money being paid, you can rest assured that they—the heads of the studio—did not like the script. Nitpicking, for the thousands of dollars that are spent, is not where it's at.

DW: Doug has a question.

Doug: What exactly made ST a success?

WS: I've been asked that question. And my answer is, that I don't know. The question of what made ST is in the area of alchemy. We talk in show business about the chemistry of a hit. Nobody knows what makes a hit. And if they knew, producers would use the same formula. But invariably, people who create a hit can never create a hit again. Or it takes many years to get another hit again.

Doug: I thought ST was a terrific concept. It goes beyond that. Like for instance, it would not have worked so well with Jeffery Hunter. You have a Shakespearian background. And the role of a starship captain was almost written especially for somebody with your type of Shakespearian experience. The captain has to be able to get up and say rousing things and be able to do a soliloquy.

WS: Right. I agree. It was as though my career as an actor led to that point at that time. That was a confluence of influences at that point that resulted in my being Captain Kirk. No doubt about it. I feel that nobody could have done the job I did. Maybe somebody could have done it better, but certainly not in the same way.

DW: Nobody could have done it better.