



An Interview With Leonard Nimoy

by Mike Harrison and Jeff Gelb

The role of Mr. Spock, as characterized by Leonard Nimoy in television's legendary "Star Trek," is one of science fiction's most fascinating and beloved. The Vulcan with the pointed ears and relentless logic lent a dimension to the program that not only led to its initial success, but contributed in a great way to the increasing number of devout "Trekkies" who keep the message of "Star Trek" alive years after the filming of the last episode.

On a recent visit to San Diego, California, Leonard Nimoy shared some of his thoughts and personal recollections with two members of the Southern California media who also just happen to be two of "Star Trek's" biggest fans.

Jeff Gelb is by day a mild-mannered popular air personality on KPRI Radio. By night he is a wild-eyed comic-book and horror film fanatic! In the sixties, he was one of the pioneers of organized comics fandom as publisher of "Men of Mystery," an early comic book fanzine, and writer for such fellow fan editors as Marvel's own Marv Wolfman in "Stories of Suspense."

Mike Harrison, also an air personality on KPRI Radio, is the album editor of "Radio and Records." At the age of nine he already published his own comic strip "Spook Town" and grew up to share Jeff Gelb's enthusiasm for science fiction. According to Harrison, his goal in life is to someday be a monster, himself. There are many people who think he has already accomplished that goal.

The following is the text of their interview with Leonard Nimoy.

MOM: WHAT TAKES UP MOST OF YOUR TIME AS OF LATE?

NIMOY: I'm doing an awful lot of travelling and a wide variety of things all over the country. In the last year I've done six different theatrical productions, including a play on Broadway last winter for Otto Preminger. This spring I did Fagan in "Oliver," and Tevya in "Fiddler on the Roof." I did "The King and I" in Wisconsin, "6 Rms Riv Vu" in Michigan, and "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" in Illinois. I've done about 25 or 30 college lecture dates which I enjoy a lot. I have a good time with those. Several personal appearances here and there. I did a movie that was just on ABC. I did that in Los Angeles last November.

MOM: OF THE MANY ROLES THAT YOU'VE PLAYED AS QUITE OBVIOUSLY AN ACCOMPLISHED ACTOR, WHICH ONE WAS YOUR FAVORITE?

NIMOY: I've had a lot of favorites. People ask me about my favorite "Star Trek" episode, and I have a lot of favorites there, too, for different reasons. There are certain shows that stand out in my mind in the series, and that I enjoyed doing in the series, but the same is true for various roles that I've played outside of "Star Trek." Obviously, Mr. Spock has to be one of my greatest experiences of all time because the character was such a remarkable challenge and a remarkable experience for me to play. There are several others, though, that I shouldn't really neglect. Playing Tevya in "Fiddler on the Roof" was a fantastic experience for me. I did it on tour for seven weeks and got an awful lot out of it. I was in San



Diego a couple of years ago doing "A Man in a Glass Booth" which was quite an experience. So it really would be unfair to choose any one role and say that's the most important, meaningful, or pleasurable. Different roles offer me something different in each case.

MOM: EVEN THOUGH YOUR ACTING CAREER BEGAN A LONG TIME BEFORE YOU PLAYED MR. SPOCK, AND YOU'VE BEEN ON MANY SHOWS SINCE "STAR TREK," MOST NOTABLY "MISSION IMPOSSIBLE," THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO THE AVERAGE PERSON'S MIND WHEN YOUR NAME IS MENTIONED IS MR. SPOCK.

NIMOY: Right.
MOM: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS TYPE-CASTING?



NIMOY: It doesn't bother me. The simplest way to put it is to say that Mr. Spock gave me a career. True, I had been working as an actor up until that time, but I certainly had no public recognition to speak of. Without public recognition it's pretty tough to get to do the things you'd like to do in my business. Once you get public recognition it becomes a lot easier because then there are places that want you and then you have some choice of material, ideas, and challenges. So, I'm very pleased with it. It hasn't created any problems for me, certainly not in the theatrical sense. I've been able to do a wide variety of things since "Star Trek."

MOM: DO YOU MEAN IT HASN'T AFFECTED THE AMOUNT OR TYPES OF ROLES YOU'VE BEEN OFFERED IN AN ADVERSE WAY?

NIMOY: No. Well, it probably has in television. I suspect that it implants certain ideas in television producers' minds about the kinds of things that they would hire me for. But, fortunately, my life isn't completely television. If a television role comes along that's interesting, I do it. If not, I don't. There are other things for me to do and that is because I played a character called Mr. Spock and became well known.

MOM: DO YOU LIKE SPOCK PERSONALLY? CAN YOU IDENTIFY WITH HIM?



NIMOY: I can identify with him completely; I have no difficulty identifying with Spock. I'm writing a book on the subject now, or trying to, and one of the things that I'm trying to deal with, or discovering as I write, is that the concept of Spock being an alien is something that I can relate to very easily, and always have. I think, probably, the roles that I've been most successful playing down through the years, before "Star Trek," were characters who were alienated in some way from their own society and felt like loners or outsiders. Most people, at some time in their lives, feel that. They feel that they are different in some way, or not acceptable. Perhaps that's one of the reasons that people find it easy to relate to the character. That's just one of the many reasons that Spock is such a popular character, but an important one.
MOM: DO YOU MISS PLAYING SPOCK? DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO OR IS THERE ANY CHANCE "STAR TREK" WILL BE STARTED OVER AGAIN?

NIMOY: I miss doing good material. When we were doing "Star Trek" much of the time we had very good material to play. That wasn't always true. In television it's extremely difficult, if not impossible, to have every script be a winner, and in that sense, we had our share of losers. But, I think by and large we had a very good high

percentage of good scripts. And I miss that. I miss good scripts, regardless of who the character is. I would be very happy to play Spock again if a good "Star Trek" script came along, and my understanding now is that it's possible that there might be a "Star Trek" movie made sometime in 1975. Gene Roddenberry, the producer has been negotiating with Paramount to put together a movie.

MOM: WOULD IT BE WITH THE ORIGINAL CAST?

NIMOY: That's the intention. At least for the moment. The studio is saying that they intend to use the original cast when they can.

MOM: THE "STAR TREK" MATERIAL THAT YOU SPOKE OF WAS, OF COURSE, SCIENCE FICTION. ARE YOU A SCIENCE FICTION FAN, AND IF SO, DID "STAR TREK" CREATE THAT INTEREST?

NIMOY: I was interested in science fiction before "Star Trek," but I would never consider myself, even now, a science fiction buff. There are people who are science fiction buffs who really make a study of the literature of science fiction and read all the important science fiction material that comes along. I don't think that I could put myself in that category at all. But, I have a great respect for



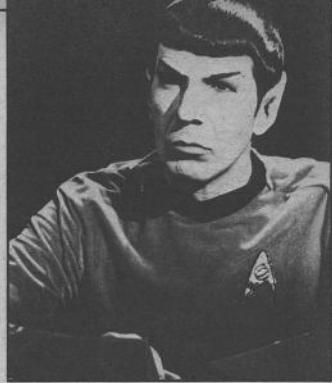
science fiction and what it offers us in the way of ideas for the future and insights into our civilization.

MOM: FROM THE EARLY "STAR TREK" EPISODES TO THE LATER ONES, THERE'S QUITE AN EVOLUTION IN THE CHARACTER OF SPOCK; MORE SO THAN ANY OTHER CHARACTER.

NIMOY: How would you describe it?
MOM: EVEN IN HIS APPEARANCE. IN THE EARLY ONES THE EYEBROWS WERE DIFFERENT, THE MAKEUP WAS DIFFERENT, THE ACTIONS WERE DIFFERENT. HE WAS TOTALLY COMPUTERIZED IN THE EARLY SHOWS BUT AS TIME WENT ON HE SHOWED MORE PERSONALITY AND EMOTION. THERE WERE THOSE STRANGE LOVE INTERESTS UNDER STRANGE INFLUENCES.

NIMOY: There is that danger when you hang around humans too long!
MOM: WAS IT YOUR DOING THAT CREATED THIS EVOLUTION OR WAS IT FROM THE DIRECTOR?

NIMOY: There was no one director and there was no one producer. Nor any one writer. A series over a period of three years, like "Star Trek," would have as many as



16 or 20 directors, and 20 or 30 writers, and 3 or 4 different producers, so I guess, in the final analysis, the control of the character falls into the hands of the actor. At least to the extent that he can influence the writers and the producers. There were changes in the character, but I think the best way to describe that is to say that we were exploring what areas we could take Spock into, and make the character interesting, and develop interesting stories of an alien character trying to function in situations that are new and strange to him. Like love stories, for example. Sometimes we were successful, sometimes we weren't. It depends on the material. As far as the look of the character is concerned, I think that became fairly rapidly refined and then maintained a constancy. In the very early shows the eyebrows were a little bit bushier and perhaps a couple of other minor touches, but by and





MOM: WE DIDN'T KNOW THAT. WE WERE GOING TO ASK YOU WHERE THEY GOT ALL THOSE OLD SEQUENCES.

NIMOY: In the original pilot that we made Jeff Hunter was the captain of the ship. That pilot didn't sell. A year later, NBC and Paramount together decided to try again. They went about shooting a new "Star Trek" pilot, and in their negotiations with Jeff Hunter they found that they couldn't get together, so they recast the role of the captain and hired Bill Shatner. Now what happened at that point was that obviously they had spent a lot of money. About 3/4 of a million dollars in the first pilot, "The Cage." There was that very marvelous footage and seemingly no way to use it. So, Gene Roddenberry constructed a story wherein we could incorporate the original pilot into the present "Star Trek" with the now captain of the ship, Captain Kirk, played by Bill Shatner. It was kind of a flashback story which told a story of my previous relationship with Jeff Hunter as captain of the Enterprise, Captain Pike. That's how this two parter came about. And in that show there is a difference in the make-up of Mr. Spock because in the original pilot the hair and eyebrows were quite a bit different, and the look of the character was a little bit different than what we had arrived at when we finally started to shoot the series. So in that show you see both of the Spock looks. You see the Spock that we finally arrived at and you see the original Spock look that had been done a year earlier in the original pilot.

MOM: IN THE NEWER PORTION OF IT WAS THE DISFIGURED CAPTAIN PIKE CONFINED TO THAT CHAIR ACTUALLY PLAYED BY JEFF HUNTER?



large, once we had refined the makeup during the first season. I think it stayed fairly stable for the run of the show.

MOM: WHICH WAS YOUR FAVORITE EPISODE?

NIMOY: (Laughs) There's that question! Well, I have several favorites for various reasons. Sometimes a show is your favorite because you explore a new area and it works successfully. Sometimes a show is your favorite because a particular script helps you to define your own character and gives you some new insight into your own character. Or sometimes you think, "Well, gee, this is what I think is the best of a 'Star Trek,' a classic 'Star Trek' episode." "The City on the Edge of Forever" was one of my favorites. I thought it was a very lovely show and very thoughtfully and tastefully done. Some of the others that come to mind are "This Side of Paradise," which I thought was a very successful exploration of a love story for Mr. Spock; certainly "Amock Time" would have to be one of my favorites. That's the story in which we go back to Vulcan and explore the Vulcan society, and the possible marriage of Mr. Spock. "Naked Time" was a very important show, very early for me, because it helped to define the schizophrenia between the Human and Vulcan sides of Mr. Spock. Those are some of the shows that I think about and some of the reasons that I think about them. There were others that I was very excited about and proud of too.

MOM: HOW ABOUT "THE MANAGERIE"?

NIMOY: Well, "The Managerie" was a classic. I didn't mean to neglect it. It contained the original "Star Trek" pilot which was a show called "The Cage." It was made a year before the second "Star Trek" pilot which actually sold the show.



NIMOY: No. In those scenes another actor was used. It was supposed to be Jeff Hunter but actually was not. It was a man whose face was covered up by make-up so that you couldn't really see who he was. There was enough resemblance, though, that it would suggest that it was Jeff Hunter.

MOM: WAS "THE MANAGERIE" RELEASED AFTER JEFFERY HUNTER HAD DIED?

NIMOY: I don't think so. I think it was on the air while he was still alive.

MOM: THAT EPISODE WON AN AWARD, DIDN'T IT?

NIMOY: I believe it won a Hugo Award for the best science fiction television show.

MOM: IN "STAR TREK'S" DANGEROUS ACTION SCENES: THE FIGHTS, THE FALLING OFF ROCKS AND ALL THAT, WERE THERE STUNTMEN AND DOUBLES EMPLOYED OR DID YOU HAVE TO TAKE RISKS, WORK OUT, AND BE IN TOP NOTCH CONDITION?

NIMOY: Bill and I were both in very good physical condition and did a lot of the things ourselves, but I would say the practice on "Star Trek" was pretty similar to what it is on any other television series or motion picture. There are stuntmen and doubles used occasionally for certain specific stunts where a person might get hurt. It's a very practical situation. The studios simply do not want actors doing those things when there is a possibility for them to be hurt because if they're hurt it shuts down production. They would much rather, although it seems like a crude way to put it, if somebody's going to get hurt, they would much rather it be a stunt man because the production won't get shut down. And of course, a stunt man gets well paid for doing that. That's his business. He



knows how to do it. If he gets hurt that's part of his profession.

MOM: WHO ARE SOME OF THE PEOPLE THAT YOU PARTICULARLY ENJOYED WORKING WITH AMONG THE ACTORS AND ACTRESSES WHO PORTRAYED THE GUEST CHARACTERS IN "STAR TREK"?

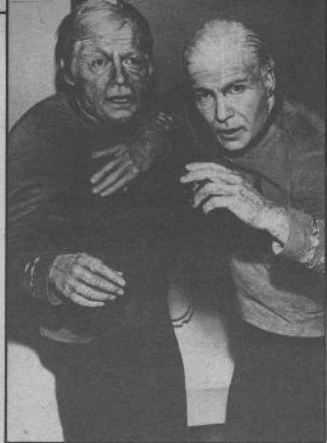
NIMOY: That's a good question which I haven't given an awful lot of thought. Among the people who come to mind is Roger Carmel, the actor who played Harry Mudd. He's a marvelous actor and he had a tremendous impact on the audiences. I loved working with Celia Lovsky, who played the Matriarch on the Vulcan planet. She has such grace and dignity and she really filled that role beautifully. I also must not forget the people who played my parents, Mark Leonard who played Sarek and Jane Wyatt who played my mother. There are so many, so many. It's hard to recall. There's one man I must not neglect. His name was Ianus Brehaska. Ianus was a very special kind of brilliant talent. He created creatures for motion pictures and worked in creature suits of various kinds. In the show called "The Devil in the Dark" which was also one of my favorite shows, the show about the Horta mother who was trying to protect her eggs, he created that Horta creature that crawled around on the ground and it was him inside that foam rubber outfit that

he created for himself, and made that character really come to life in a very difficult job. Ianus was one of the people who, unfortunately was killed in a plane crash about a year ago. There was a motion picture company up in Northern California shooting some studies of apes. He was doing an ape character and was on that plane when the entire company was killed. So, I obviously must mention him because he was very helpful to us and particularly in that show and in a couple of other episodes where he did other creatures for us as well.

MOM: TELL US ABOUT YOUR OFF CAMERA RELATIONSHIP WITH BILL SHATNER.

NIMOY: Bill and I are very much alike, interestingly enough. We have the same kind of energy, the same kind of attack on problems, and a very similar and common sense of humor. We make each other laugh easily. And when we do get together today, every once in a while, we just babble and tell each other funny stories and remind each other of funny things, and we just have a terrific time talking to each other. I don't see him very much. He's traveling an awful lot, as am I, and we're very rarely in the same place at the same time. But we still do enjoy talking. I talk to DeForest Kelly very frequently, he's a good friend, and an occasional phone conversation or meeting with Jimmy Goohan and Michelle Nichols. I see George Takai periodically in Los Angeles. Terrific guy.





Very bright, wonderful human being. They're a terrific bunch of people. We were very lucky. The chemistry on that show between the actors was pretty remarkable, and I think quite rare for a television series.

MOM: "STAR TREK" SEEMS TO HAVE GAINED ITS GREAT POPULARITY THROUGH ITS RE-RUNS WHICH ARE SHOWN IN JUST ABOUT EVERY CITY IN THE COUNTRY, SOMETIMES TWO, THREE, OR MORE TIMES PER WEEK. MOST PEOPLE HAVE TURNED ON TO THE SHOW IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING ITS RUN AS A NEW SERIES. DO YOU THINK "STAR TREK" WAS AHEAD OF ITS TIME?

NIMOY: I think that's possibly true. There was a little bit of that. After all, we first went on the air before we even sent anyone to the moon. It was a little difficult for a lot of people to focus on us as a show having any merit. But I think just as important, and maybe more important, is simply the fact that the show is now on at times when people can watch it. The scheduling; the time slots that NBC gave us; I think that you could very easily say that those would be time slots that you would give a show if you wanted to get rid of it. Particularly the third season. They put us on Friday night at 10 o'clock which is an awful time slot for a show like that. It's a good spot for Lawrence Welk, where the audience is a quiet, stay at home, sit down kind of audience. But our audience, a natural "Star Trek" audience, they're just not home Friday night at 10 o'clock. They're involved in school activities. They're involved in dating. I think it was a very bad choice on NBC's part for a show like ours. Now, as you point out, the show is on very frequently in most cities in the country, and in many cities it's on five, six, seven days a week and usually when many people can get to a TV set and watch it. 6 o'clock in the evening, that kind of thing.

MOM: DO THE PRINCIPLES IN "STAR TREK"

STILL RECEIVE RESIDUALS?

NIMOY: No. Residuals are an area of great misconception. We do get residuals, but only through a certain number of runs. I think it's five re-runs. After the original run its on a diminishing scale. By the time you get down to the last run, the fifth or sixth run, you're getting a small amount of money, but still being paid. After that, the studio owns the film outright and they no longer pay residuals to anyone. In the "Star Trek" reruns the five or six re-runs ran out a long time ago. None of us are getting any money from it now.

MOM: DO YOU EVER WATCH THE RE-RUNS ON TELEVISION?

NIMOY: I watched the show last night. It happened that some people asked me yesterday what my favorite episode was and I mentioned several including "City on the Edge of Forever" and they said it's on tonight. I hadn't seen it since it was on the air six or seven years ago, whenever it was, and I did watch it last night and I did enjoy it. I watch the show occasionally to try to get a feeling of what the show looks like today in terms of a contemporary context.

MOM: DO YOU THINK THEY STILL HOLD UP WELL?

NIMOY: Yes I do, I do. And in many interesting ways perhaps even more powerfully than they did then. We've come through some remarkable experiences as a people in the last ten or twelve years, and certainly in the last couple of years. Political problems, the war, economic problems, ecological problems, energy problems, that kind of thing. It's very exciting to me to watch some of the "Star Trek" episodes today and see the ideas that were in that show placed against the context of the present. I think they hold up remarkably well.

MOM: WE AGREE. OBVIOUSLY, A LOT OF PEOPLE DO.