

Clockwise from left: Spock's (Leonard Nimoy) farewell in *The Wrath Of Khan*; Kirk (William Shatner) cannae take it; *The Motion Picture*'s Enterprise money shot; Gene Roddenberry and *The Motion Picture* director Robert Wise look to the future with key cast.







All Our Yesterdays

As the first two *Star Trek* movies hit 4K, the legendary WILLIAM SHATNER talks transferring *Trek* to the big screen

THESE DAYS, WHEN it doesn't seem you can so much as open the fridge without finding a new *Star Trek* project in development next to the milk, it's hard to believe that in the early 1980s the franchise was at death's door. Cancelled in 1969 after three seasons and 79 episodes, attempts to revive it both as a low-budget movie and a new series had foundered. Worse was to come. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) was a $40 million damp squib, lambasted by critics for its glacial pacing. But it made enough for a sequel in 1982, with creator Gene Roddenberry gently moved aside in favour of executive producer Harve Bennett and director Nicholas Meyer. And with *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan* — which ditched the philosophical ponderings of the first movie, revived a classic villain, and put the relationships between the beloved crew front and centre — the series gloriously rediscovered its space legs. Now both films are getting the 4K re-release treatment, so we opened up a comms link with one of the last surviving original *Trek* cast members, Captain James T. Kirk himself: William Shatner.

This is going to be another trip down memory lane for you. Surely there can't now be anything about *Star Trek* that you haven't been asked?
[*Laughs*] Well, maybe I can come up with something that's fresh. It's all good. I always enjoy talking about it.

Do you remember how you felt when the show got cancelled?
The series had actually been slated for cancellation at the end of the second season. Then there was this write-in campaign, which may or may not have been orchestrated by Gene Roddenberry. I've never been quite clear about it. But in any case, it was successfully renewed until the end of the third season. So it wasn't a big surprise. We were very much aware that it was trembling on the edge of a precipice. But we — when I say "we" I mean the cast and the crew — were really involved in the show. We really all loved the show. And I for one had wanted it to continue. I was happy. But then we got a cancellation notice. And it was suddenly all over.

That must have been a tough time for you.
I had been in shows that stopped playing, whether it was on Broadway or a series. But that's part of being an actor. You're out of work a lot of the time. So with great reluctance I left the set on that last day. And personally, I'd just been divorced. All the money I had made was going into that divorce. So a couple of months after *Star Trek* I was really broke. I started doing what we call summer theatre. And I went with a truck and a camper on the back — you guys have another name for it...

Caravan?
Yes! A caravan. I went with a caravan, drove across the continent with my dog and did 13 ›

weeks of summer stock. I was making a living. I was earning some money to keep my kids fed and a roof over their heads. And gradually I was able to save some money. Six years went by and I'd get a call every so often: "We think we're doing another series," or, "We're thinking of doing a special with *Star Trek*", "We're thinking of doing a movie with *Star Trek*," and nothing happened. Until one day I was told that Robert Wise had been hired to do the movie. And so, for me, that's when it really became a fact.

What did you think of the screenplay for *The Motion Picture* when you first read it?
The basic story was, I thought, a really great science-fiction story. A machine goes out, a probe, is captured by machines that are alive and comes back, and for some reason wants to destroy the Earth [*laughs*]. It's a really good one-liner. It's really intriguing.

The Voyager probes had only been launched four or five years earlier. It was a smart idea to capitalise on that...
Yeah. And now, with the talk of AI becoming sentient, it's even more relevant. It brought up the question of, when does something transition into consciousness? That's what the plot of *The Motion Picture* was really about. It was a pretty deep science-fiction script. And when *Star Trek* was at its best, it asked those profound questions.

It must have been fun to get back with your castmates when you'd thought it was all over.
It was absolutely a delight. But it was also great to have somebody, in Robert Wise, important at the helm of this movie. We all had really high hopes. But then Wise was rushed. If I remember, there was a strike or something that wasted a period of time between the filming and the release. What many people really didn't realise was that Robert Wise, this great editor, really didn't have much of a chance to edit. Mainly the special effects. It was a very primitive time then compared to what it is today, so it took a lot longer to get the effects they wanted. The film was put together more hastily than Robert Wise would have liked. And when it premiered in Washington, the story is that the guy came running in with the cans of film under his arm. Today those flaws can be fixed more quickly, and that's the kind of thing that Wise would have done, had he had the time to finesse the film.









Despite its flaws, it's still a wonderful-looking film. That Enterprise reveal shot is a heartstopper.
Yeah, it's a huge big-screen moment. I think we have seen so many iterations of *Star Trek* that we've lost that sense of awe at the majesty of that spaceship. I was dazzled in wonderment at the movie. I was used to these TV shows.



Here: Ricardo Montalban, bringing the wrath (and pecs) as Khan. **Left, top to bottom:** Spock, Kirk and Bones in their new *Motion Picture* uniforms; Mark Lenard (aka Sarek, Spock's dad) as the Klingon Captain; Ilia (Persis Khambatta) takes a shine to Decker (Stephen Collins); The groundbreaking Nichelle Nichols as Uhura.

The fact that it wasn't lauded was disappointing to all of us. And then, as I understand it, the head of Paramount, Charlie Bludhorn, went back home and said, "We're not going to do any more *Star Trek*," and his wife convinced him, because she loved *Star Trek*, to do more. So he put it into the arms of the television department and they made *Wrath Of Khan*.

Gene Roddenberry was kind of eased out of that movie, wasn't he?
Well, Gene's history is very interesting. When the series was made, he was moved up after the first 13 shows, and then we went on for two-and-a-half years after that. Then the show is cancelled and everybody goes their way. I always imagine that *Star Wars* comes out and it makes billions, so the executives at Paramount are sitting around wailing, "Look at that! We gotta do something!" And they knew nothing of the history so they brought in Roddenberry, who had been moved gracefully out of any position of making decisions on the original series. Then I don't know what battles he might have had, but now they're going to make a second movie and they begin to realise that Roddenberry is not the asset they thought he was. And he makes a deal to make a tremendous amount of money per movie that we make without him. You know, when they made *The Next Generation*, the same thing happened. They brought in somebody else. There's a whole history there. I don't talk much about it. Everybody has their flaws.

The two great masterstrokes were bringing Khan back and killing Spock...
Yeah. Khan was a wonderful villain. Wonderful at exposing his pectorals [*laughs*].

How was working with Ricardo Montalban?
Well, as a teenager living in Montreal, every couple of years we'd go down to New York City for a weekend to see some of the shows. And I saw a show where there was a guy dancing. Why would I remember a guy dancing in a girlie show? But I saw this guy dancing and he was a wonderful, wonderful dancer and a good-looking guy. Then I'd go to the movies and I'd see this same guy, and he was a Latin lover. Then I saw him become a villain and now he's the bad guy. So in my mind I kind of had a history with Ricardo. He was always in my head. I don't know why he made such an impact. I never liked the way I looked, and maybe I was looking for a guy who I wished I looked like. Then, one day, he comes on the set. If I remember, he was walking with a cane. He said he'd fallen off a horse. Whatever he had done, it never healed. And he got into a walker and then into a wheelchair. I got to really become a friend. I mean, imagine — *I* have enough trouble getting out of bed in the morning, but for a dancer becoming crippled... I never really discussed this with him. It must have been awful. I loved him.

Below, top to bottom: Spock puts the needs of the many above the needs of his survival in *The Wrath Of Khan*; Spock's send-off by the crew, plus Kirstie Alley and some bagpipes.



What did you think about killing Spock? Did you see that as the masterstroke it was?
Erm, no [*laughs*]. Originally nobody told me anything. "Keep it from Shatner because he's likely to bleat it out in an interview!" Then I thought it was a crippling idea. I thought, "My God, [Leonard Nimoy] is leaving this fountain of art and commerce that is *Star Trek*. Why is he doing that? That's the silliest thing I've ever heard." I remember shooting it, him going over to DeForest [Kelley] and saying, "Remember," and nobody had told me. I thought, "What is he doing?" All these clues that I should have picked up on... And it *was* a masterstroke. Leonard and I had become by that time great friends, but he never told me about that plan. I just stupidly blundered on.

It was sad news about Nichelle Nichols' passing. What was your happiest memory of working with her?
Well, kissing her, of course. That was a very pleasant adventure. A beautiful lady and I get to kiss her. But also, in the early part, we flirted with each other, as two friends. And we would every so often sit down and talk about what she was doing, her son, what her ambitions were. In those early years I got to know her quite well. For a while there was a great flirtation going on that was great fun. But recently we lost track of each other. I would see her occasionally at a gathering of *Star Trek* people. She was an amazing, groundbreaking actress.

Let's finish with something you've maybe never been asked before: do you ever dream about *Star Trek*?
I don't know about a dream you wake up from. But *Star Trek*... Although I wasn't a youth, I was young, so it represents a youthful success to me. Not that I hadn't had success before. I had been on Broadway, I had been in films. I had even been in a previous television series. But *Star Trek* was a kind of apotheosis of youthful success. But also I was in the midst of an unhappy marriage, so it was positive and negative. I learned on *Star Trek* to keep a public face to avoid showing, or even living, the pain that I was feeling. Going to work and being 'the actor'. So it was quite a moment in my life, *Star Trek*. **ADAM SMITH**

***STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE* AND *STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN* ARE OUT NOW ON 4K BLU-RAY**

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