

25 August 2024.

Dear Bobby,

Thank you for agreeing to answer some questions re the Planet of the Apes TV series. At this late stage there are few people left who worked on the series and even fewer willing to talk about it.

I understand that you only guest starred on two episodes but I hope you can shed some light on some of my questions re aspects of the production.

1. We know that the episode scripts often underwent considerable adjustment eg The Cure changed from Amy being 12 year old with Pete Burke taking a fatherly interest in her, to Amy being 16 year old with her primary relationship being with Alan Virdon. In your experience were these changes often made by the actors once filming began? If so, how were those changes made? Were the changes made on the run by the director, or was permission sought from higher ups?

I have had the great fortune to have been an actor on many well written television series throughout my 50 year career. The Planet of the Apes television experience was my very first. I had already worked with Roddy McDowell on The Poseidon Adventure and then Battle for the Planet of the Apes. I had seen how changes to the scripts had worked on feature films. Most of the major changes took place in pre production. Many suggested changes were addressed after the cast had the opportunity to have a "table read" prior to the beginning of filming. Television, however, was a much faster paced process. With the Apes project it was even more challenging. The locations, the makeup process and the weather made for very little opportunity to change the script "on the fly." There was only one actor on the set who would have had the stature to request a change of dialogue. And Roddy, in my experiences with him, did not exercise that privilege.

If changes were made, either before or during production, they were made by the writing staff and the creative producers assigned to that particular episode. If we had new lines to learn for the shooting day, we were given new pages to insert into our scripts (sometimes that very day) that were a different color from the traditional white pages of the "Shooting script" when we began each episode.

Over the years I participated on many productions with scripts that had as many as 8-10 different colors in their final scripts!

2. We know from interviews with Mark Lenard and Zina Bethune that opportunities for multiple takes were limited and that actors had to rehearse their lines as the lights were being set up. The fact this was commented on implies this series was under more time pressures/constraints than many of its contemporaries. Was this your experience? In this regard was it very different from other series in your experience?

I mentioned in my answer to question 1 that television production is always going to be, by the very nature of the budgets and the volume of product needed in a very short time, extremely fast. Over the years, the Boy Scout motto I reminded my fellow cast members who might be young or new to the industry is "Be Prepared!" I still, to this day, have the occasional nightmare

that I showed up to the set completely unaware of what my lines were! The Planet of the Apes television “experiment” was always challenged by 1) the desire to make the actors in Ape makeup look as good as we did in the features, and 2) give the audience the visual quality of shooting on location ... frequently at the same “Fox Ranch” ( now known as Malibu Creek State Park ) where we shot the features. (Ask Dean about his experiences at The Ranch! ) Another challenge the producers had was in hiring guest actors who had little or no prosthetic makeup experience and then putting them in front of very hot lights at “The Ranch” in the summer. Midday temperatures were frequently well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (approx. 38 degrees C )

3. What was the working environment like on the series? Eileen Dietz remarked that after the day’s filming completed, people went home straight away (because of commuting distance) instead of socialising as often happened in her experience on other sets. Was the set generally harmonious and professional? My reading of interviews over the years indicates such but given my first 2 questions and Eileen’s comment, it would seem difficult for people to keep their composure on long days under difficult conditions (heat etc.)

I LOVED working on the Planet Of The Apes feature and television series. I poured my heart and soul into whatever I was asked to do. Having said that, I will tell you that, at the end of the day, this 20 year old fit, long distance runner and martial artist was completely physically spent! And after spending 45 minutes to an hour getting the makeup off my face I had a two hour drive to get home. There were many days when I only had about 4-5 hours at my house before I got back into my car to repeat the process! Oh, and while I was busy “monkeying around” I was a pre med student at the University of California, Irvine. It was a little known but significant rule change that occurred in the Screen Actors Guild contract as a result of the Apes television project. We were finally allowed to have 12 hours off between the time we “wrapped” and the time we had to report back to work! This was, without exaggeration, life saving.

As for the mood of the cast and crew on the set? It was professional, respectful and executed with the pride in knowing we were a part of something very special indeed. The mere fact that we’re honoring it 50 years later is the proof!

4. Finally, is there anything you would like to say about working with the three leads: Roddy, Ron and James. As part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations I will be writing bios of all three with a focus on their lives, not just birthdates and career highlights. I will be using already-published info and definitely NOT trash talking them. So if you have anything you want put on the record, please feel free to use this opportunity. Bios will be published on Hunter Goatley’s Archives site, alongside my three existing works.

I had the honor of working with Roddy four times in my career. It is truly one of the experiences in my life that I cherish most! Ron and James came to the Apes franchise knowing full well that they had been given career defining opportunities ... and they were as prepared and as professional as any human could be expected to be ! ;) After all, they weren’t Apes! ;)

I am very proud to share my experiences with the Apes community because I have always found them to be intelligent, respectful and exceptionally loyal. I wish you the very best in the future and would love to have you give Dean a link to your projects.

If you haven't read Dean's book, "Who Said Apes Have No Tales" or the remarkable documentary, "Making Apes ... The Artists Who Changed Film" I strongly urge you to do so!

Be well. I hope this helped you!

Bobby Porter

27.8.2024

Thank you kindly,

Susan Cunningham