

'Star Trek' begins secret movie mission

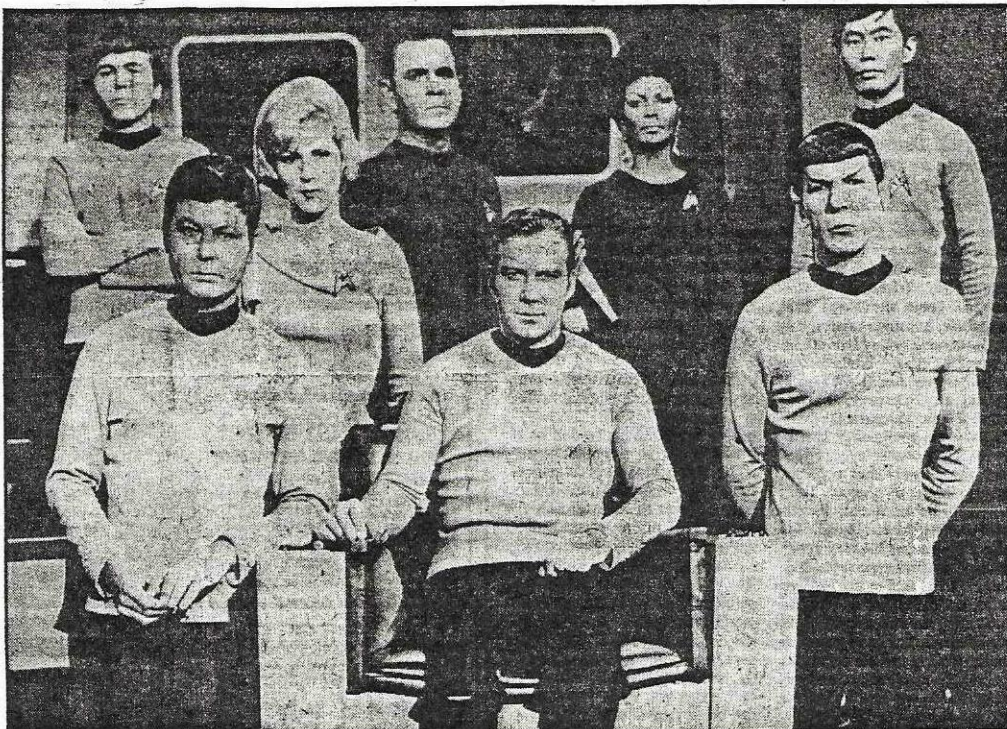
By KAREN FELD
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LOS ANGELES — There's almost as much secrecy surrounding preparations for the launching of Paramount Studios' new U.S.S. Enterprise as there was for the first Russian spaceship. The most celebrated spaceship in television history has been rebuilt utilizing sophisticated 23rd century technology.

The launching on a new mission from Hollywood is set for this month when "Star Trek — The Motion Picture," not to be confused with the TV series, goes into production.

It's fearsome crew, Capt. James Kirk, played by William Shatner, and his First Officer, the Vulcan, Dr. Spock, played by Leonard Nimoy, as well as Medical Officer "Bones" McCoy played by DeForest Kelley have been reunited for this momentous science fiction event. The motion picture, with a budget of \$15-million, which is greater than the cost of all 79 television episodes combined, is scheduled for release next summer.

Nimoy, Shatner and "Star Trek" creator, Gene Roddenberry, have been so bombarded with "Trekkies" that they have hired a publicist to carefully guard the secrets of the new mission in an effort to perpetuate the "Star Trek" mystique. The original "Star Trek" series aired for three seasons beginning in 1966 on NBC-TV before the network canceled it due to poor ratings. "Trekkies" throughout the country protested. They formed active and very vocal fan clubs, organized conventions where thousands congregated; they displayed bumper stickers on their cars — "Honk If You Love Star Trek"; and "Spock for President."



After a decade, the original "Star Trek" cast is launching a new voyage in Hollywood.

The show went back on the air in off-network syndicated reruns. It was scheduled in an earlier time slot and its popularity soared. It is currently seen on 160 American stations and in 51 foreign countries in 47 languages. Some episodes have been shown as many as 20 times. The increasing popularity and magic of "Star Trek" is novel in the fickle entertainment industry, since the last show was filmed a decade ago.

Just days before the much postponed and awaited production date, writers Gene Roddenberry and Harold Livingston are busy revising the script which is based on an original story by Alan Dean Foster and Roddenberry. Bob Abel, Con Pederson and Richard Taylor are reading spectacular special effects. Pederson supervised that area on "2001: A Space Odyssey." Four-time Academy Award winning director Robert Wise ("West Side Story," "The

Sound of Music") and producer Gene Roddenberry, creators of the original "Star Trek" TV series, are engaged in pre-production details. Academy Award winning composer Jerry Goldsmith ("Chinatown," "Planet of the Apes") is putting final touches on the musical score for "Star Trek — The Motion Picture."

Each member of the cast is busy preparing for the role he will assume for the next four months. Also returning from the original cast are James Doohan: George Takei, Nichelle Nichols, Walter Koenig, Majel Barrett, and Grace Lee Whitney. Former "Miss India," Persis Khambatta, plays an exotic crew member joining the Enterprise from a distant planet.

Both Nimoy and Kelley became so closely identified with the roles that they played in "Star Trek" that it has had a tremendous impact on both their personal lives and careers. Their lives have contrasted sharply over the past decade. Nimoy, spending much time on the road

working, and Kelley spending much time at home.

Roddenberry is carefully guarding the premise of the film. "When you find out, let me know," says Kelley. But some information has been transported out. "Spock has aged 10 years," says Nimoy. "Everybody ages, even in science fiction."

And Nimoy, too, is 10 years older and has matured as an actor. Although he is most closely identified with the role of Spock, he has worked continuously, playing a variety of parts in film, television and theater, including the psychiatrist in "Equus," Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof," Eagin in "Oliver," and Paris in "Mission: Impossible." "Characters all become children. It's very difficult to say, 'this was the best,'" says Nimoy. He has also written, produced, directed, and toured with his one-man show, "Vincent," based on the relationship between Vincent van Gogh and his brother, Theo.

In contrast to both Nimoy and Shatner, who have not been out of work since "Star Trek" was cancelled, Kelley's career was affected differently. "It's been a mixed blessing," says Kelley. "It has given me enormous popularity among the people, but at the same time it has crippled my career as far as picture work is concerned. 'Star Trek' changed the whole course of my life," he explains. "I became so identified with the role of the doctor that everything that was offered to me afterwards was the role of a doctor. Nothing was seemingly coming my way that was really stimulating, so as a result, I just kind of coasted with life," says Kelley. "I'm basically a very lazy actor anyhow. And I enjoy doing nothing about as well as anyone you ever met," he added.

"Star Trek" has just never let go my life. It's with me day and night," says Kelley. "Mail comes from people from all

walks of life, from doctors and lawyers. It seems to have raised a hope for the future with most people."

Never has a show achieved such popularity in reruns and never have fans been so vocal and supportive for such a long period of time after a show has been canceled. All of the principals are still receiving fan mail and recognition as if they were still doing a hit show. Nimoy receives approximately 20,000 pieces of mail a month from fans. Kelley points out: "It feels weird, like you're doing a hit show and not being compensated for it."

"Star Trek" has become a cultural phenomena. "It seems to touch a very responsive chord in people from all walks of life from 8 to 80," says Kelley. "It just keeps picking up new viewers in syndication — whole new little generations," he adds. He attributes its appeal to the fact that it's a very optimistic show. "It showed the youths that there was some place to go that this was only the beginning of an adventuresome time of life." Another explanation Kelley offers for the popularity of "Star Trek" is "the unshamed camaraderie and love and respect for everybody."

Gene Roddenberry had hoped to do a feature a few years ago, but was unable to interest the studios in it at that time. Rich Frank, head of Paramount Television Services, spent a half a million dollars on new "Star Trek" sets last winter and tried to develop a new "Star Trek" TV series for a so-called "limited fourth network" to air every Saturday evening on a group of independent and network affiliate stations. It was to be transmitted by the Paramount-owned Hughes Satellite. The project was put in a holding pattern last spring due to lack of advertiser support. But the studio feels the time is right for a feature, and that it will be more economically feasible than a new TV series.

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— De Forest Kelley

