

Jeffrey Hunter Interview -

Jan 30, 1965

Los Angeles Citizen News

January 30, 1965

Male Call

by Joan Schmitt

It's hard to imagine roles less similar than Jesus Christ, Temple Houston, a schizophrenic and a Buck Rogers-type space explorer, but Jeff Hunter somersaults from one to the other with amazing aplomb.

As we talked on the set of his current film "Brainstorm," a make-up man was applying grayish shadow to make Jeff's cerulean blue eyes even brighter. He portrays a schizophrenic in the Warner Bros. picture, and his eyes, darting about and filled with anxiety, become a useful tool in depicting the madness that lurks in his mind. These same eyes were soft and compassionate when he played Jesus in "King of Kings," and I asked if he felt that role had affected his career.

"I was warned not to do it," he said. "Actors who play Jesus are supposed to have a hard time getting other roles to follow, but I felt this was a myth. After all, how can you be type-cast as Christ? There just aren't that many Jesus roles around. If it affected my career at all I think it helped it, and I doubt if the public thought of me as Christ when they next saw me as Temple Houston on television. Max Von Sydow, who plays Christ in "The Greatest Story Ever Told," has already been cast as the male lead in "Hawaii," so obviously he hasn't been type-cast either."

I asked if the rumors I had heard were true -- if he had really abstained from smoking, drinking and naughty language while filming "King of Kings." He smiled and seemed a little embarrassed at what I had asked, "To a certain degree, I did," he answered. "You try to get the feel of any role, but it's much more difficult in the case of Christ because every one has their own personal image of Him. It's a role you take on, knowing that no matter how you play it, you are going to disappoint many."

Since Jeff had to look straight ahead into the mirror as the make-up man worked on him, I had an opportunity to stare without being obvious. He's more handsome in person than on the screen, mainly because of his coloring. He has a healthy sun-washed complexion, blue, blue eyes, thick black lashes and black hair streaked with gray. Since he looks too young to be turning gray I asked if his hair had been dyed for the role in "Brainstorm." The make-up man answered, "Yes, I touch it up every morning"...then Jeff laughed and said that wasn't true. His hair began graying several years ago.

Jeff is married to the former Dusty Bartlett and the couple have a "yours, mine, and ours" household of children.

There are three energetic boys -- ages 13, 12, and 6 -- one by Jeff's former marriage to Barbara Rush, one by Dusty's former marriage, and one between the two. It's enough to keep any father jumping, and Jeff's all-around activities in his own youth make a good example for the boys to follow.

While co-captaining the football team, his studies didn't take second place, and he was president of his class and later president of his high school student body. Although he won many awards in sports, it was a scholastic scholarship that got him into Northwestern University, where he graduated in 1949.

Jeff's big enthusiasm at the moment is a pilot he's just finished for a new Desilu television series that will hopefully be on the air in the fall. It's a science fiction show -- year 2000, with Jeff playing an American cosmonaut who patrols the galaxy in a 190,000-ton space city. The 'ship' carries a crew of 203 people, who visit American colonies in space as well as unexplored planets.

"We run into pre-historic worlds, contemporary societies and civilizations far more developed than our own," he said. It's a great format because writers have a free hand -- they can have us land on a monster-infested planet, or deal in human relations involving the large number of people who live together on this gigantic ship.

"We should know within several weeks whether the show's been sold. It will be an hour long, in color with a regular cast of a half-dozen or so, and an important guest star part each week. They're calling it 'Star Trek.' The thing that intrigues me most about the show is that it is actually based on the Rand Corp.'s projection of things to come. Except for the fictional characters, it will almost be like getting a look into the future and some of the predictions will surely come true in our life-time.

"With all the weird surroundings of outer space the basic underlying theme of the show is a philosophical approach to man's relationship to woman. There are both sexes in the crew, in fact, the first officer is a woman."

Sex in orbit? How intriguing. It's comforting to know there are some things that just won't ever change!