

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH ACTOR SCOTT BAKULA

TOPIC: HIS LEADING ROLE IN "SHENANDOAH" AT FORD'S THEATRE

MODERATOR: JONATHAN SALANT, PRESIDENT, THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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MR. SALANT: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jonathan Salant, a reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the Club.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN. Please hold your applause during the speech so we have time for as many questions as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I'd like to -- (inaudible) -- you hear applause, it is from the guests and the members of the general public who attend our luncheons, not from the working press.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the National Press Club's website at www.press.org. Press Club members may also get free transcripts of our luncheons at the website. Nonmembers may buy transcripts, audio

tapes and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at area code 202-662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind our audience of future speakers.

On April 20th, John Negropante, National Intelligence director, will discuss "Intelligence Reform: Making It Happen."

On April 27th, Christina Norman, the president of MTV, will discuss "Permanent Youth Revolution: Building Tomorrow's Leaders."

And on May 8th, we have Senator Russell Feingold, a Wisconsin Democrat.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards provided on your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits.

Announcement that the club has a few group tickets remaining for "Shenandoah" on Thursday evening at 7:30 at the Ford's Theatre. These discount tickets are available at the front desk at the conclusion of the luncheon.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all of head table guests are introduced.

From your right: Donald Frederick, a freelance journalist and a former writer and editor with National Geographic; John Hurley, president of the Confederate Memorial Association and cofounder of the Capital Hill Civil War Roundtable; Ed Schaefer of the St. Louis Informer; "Mokie" Pratt Porter, director of communications for the Vietnam Veterans of America, and the editor VVA Veteran; Suzanne Struglinski, Washington correspondent for the Deseret Morning News; Richard Thompson, chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Ford Theatre Society and the senior vice president for policy and government affairs with the Bristol-Meyers-Squibb Company; John Hughes, my colleague at Bloomberg News and the chair of the speaker's committee.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment: Melissa Charbonneau, the White House correspondent for CBN News and a member of the speaker's committee who arranged today's luncheon -- and Melissa, thank you very much; Paul Tetreault, producing director for Ford's Theatre; Rick Dunham, White House correspondent for Business Week and my immediate predecessor as president of the National Press Club; Elizabeth Smith-Brownstein, author of "Lincoln's Other White House," and "If This House Could Talk"; and Carla Stey (sp), a journalist for the War and Peace Digest.

(Applause.)

Long before James Kirk, Jean-Luc Picard, Benjamin Sisko or Kathryn Janeway boldly went where no one had gone before, Starship captain Jonathan Archer flew off into the final frontier. Alas, United Paramount network did something that the Klingons, the Romulans, or the

Cardassians -- (laughter) -- could not accomplish -- ground the USS Enterprise. (Laughter.) Scott Bakula occupied the captain's chair for the fifth installment of the Star Trek franchise. A prequel to the original series that took place 100 hundred years before Kirk, Spock, and McCoy explored strange new worlds and sought out new life and new civilizations.

Mr. Bakula was no stranger to science fiction, having starred in "Quantum Leap," named by TV Guide as one of the top 25 cult shows. He played Dr. Sam Beckett, who leaped from the body of a different person from a different time period each week, as he traveled even faster than warp speed. His work on the series earned him a Golden Globe award and four Emmy nominations.

Rather than the future, Scott Bakula's current project is rooted in the past. He's starring in the musical "Shenandoah," now playing at Ford's Theatre here in Washington. Mr. Bakula stepped into the role made famous on the silver screen by Jimmy Stewart, that of Southern patriarch Charlie Anderson, who tried to keep his six sons out of the Civil War. He gets dragged into the conflict when his youngest son is captured by Union forces. Mr. Bakula, as Anderson, is repulsed by the horrors of war and wonders what is worth fighting for.

The musical first debuted in 1975 at the end of the Vietnam War, which had been protested by hundreds of thousands of Americans and a few of the presidential candidacies of such men as Eugene McCarthy, Robert Kennedy, and George McGovern. Its current staging coincides with another overseas war that polls show is losing support at home, the ongoing war in Iraq, in which more than 2,000 American troops have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

The play has certainly struck a cord. I received more questions through our website for Mr. Bakula than for all of our other speakers this year combined.

For Mr. Bakula these performances at Ford's Theatre mark a return to the early days of his professional acting career. After moving to New York, he started out playing several supporting roles in productions of "Shenandoah," earning his Actor's Equity card in the process. His first role on Broadway was that of Joe DiMaggio in the play "Marilyn: An American Fable," and then was nominated for a Tony Award for his performance in "Romance, Romance."

He went on to film and television. TV credits include guest spots on "Murphy Brown" and "Designing Women." He appeared in the Oscar-winning movie, "American Beauty," as well as in "Major League III: Back to the Minors," where perhaps he picked up some tips he can share with the National Press Club softball team. (Laughter.)

Mr. Bakula, here's your cue to take the stage. Welcome to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. BAKULA: Thank you for that very kind introduction. I'm honored to be here and to be a guest of the National Press Club.

I've been in D.C. for a couple of months now at the Ford's Theatre, as you all know, and I've had an incredibly wonderful time, great experience artistically. First and foremost, "Shenandoah" has been a great full cycle for me to come back to. And secondly, as you know, it's been a beautiful

spring here, and I've had a chance to really get out and enjoy D.C., a town that I love. And so thank you for that nice weather.

I'd like to especially thank Paul Tetreault, the Ford's producing director for bringing me here, Ford's board chairman, Dick Thompson, for participating in a first-rate production at the Ford's Theatre. And again, I'm very thankful. And thank you for being here today also, gentlemen.

So now I was going to talk about what the show's about. Get rid of that. You did that. (Laughter). Was going to talk about a slave owner -- yes, his kid is taken away. Let's get rid of that. (Laughter). Talk about 30 years ago when I went to New York City. You kinda did that. I could talk a little bit about that but -- (laughter). What you didn't say -- a little bit.

Thirty years ago I did leave St. Louis and go to New York City, and I arrived on a Wednesday, auditioned on Friday for a show and got a part in a non-union dinner theater tour in North Carolina -- \$100 a week, plus room and board -- in "Shenandoah," and I played the role of Sam, which ironically was a name of a character that came back to me a few years later.

So a week after I had arrived in New York, I had a job. I went to see my first Broadway show, which again was "Shenandoah," with John Cullum in his Tony Award-winning performance at the Alvin Theater. One year later, Phil Rose, who was the director and producer of that show, hired me to be in the ensemble of "Shenandoah" and gave me my Equity card, which for an actor is a very, very important little thing to have in your pocket when you go to auditions in New York, because if you don't have it, you get in a long line and you wait for hours, and they see you or they don't see you at the end of auditions, depending on how they're feeling.

So I have a long, long history with the show. And then I did go on to do five or six other shows. So I can throw that away. (Laughter.)

However, a year ago when Jeff Calhoun, who directed this production at the Ford's Theatre, called me and asked me to consider doing the show, he had no idea of my connections with the show. We had met working side by side in two small 99-seat theaters in L.A. -- yes, there is theater in L.A. -- and it's wonderful theater, but you don't hear about it very often. We met in 1986. I hadn't talked to him or seen him in 20, 18, 19 years. He said, "I think we should do 'Shenandoah.' I think we should do it at the Ford's Theatre, and I think it would be great if you would be in it."

And I said, well, when you going to do it?"

"In a year."

And I said, "Well, gosh, I never can figure out a year ahead in my life; my series could still be going on."

"Well, if it's not going on, maybe we could it; it would be great and it would just be so wonderful."

And I hung up the phone and said this is never, never going to happen.

And many things happened in the last year, including "Enterprise" being cancelled and UPN being cancelled and -- (laughter) -- but that's a whole 'nother journey, and I know there are one or two questions for me. But it just seemed for me to be a great finish to one chapter of my journey of 30 years now in this business. And it seemed to be -- the opportunity to do this piece at the Ford's Theatre during this time in our country's history, I just got more and more excited about doing it. It felt right; it felt important, without being pretentious. And it had literally been 18 years since I had been in a long-running musical of any kind, or theater production of any kind. "Romance, Romance" was my last Broadway show.

So here I am for two more weeks. And in two weeks, I'm leaving. Brian Sutherland will be replacing me on May 2nd; he's a Broadway veteran, singer, actor. He's done many shows in New York. I've seen him do a little bit. He's actually rehearsing today, and he's wonderful. So I encourage everyone who's seen me to go back because there's something about seeing other people do a role like this that is really wonderful.

My biggest challenge was getting John Cullum out of my head. John Cullum, Ed Ames, John Raitt, Chester Ludkin (ph) -- four Charlies that I worked with over the years who were all wonderful, all different, and hopefully, my own Charlie also.

So that's why I'm here. It worked out. I got here. I remember Jeff saying to me that -- I'm imagining it was you, Paul, who said well, what's your plan B if Scott can't do it? And Jeff said there is no plan B. (Laughter.) And I'm sure -- I don't know what you said to that, Paul, but you made up your own plan B in your own pocket. But Jeff was relentless and worked this out and has reimagined this show in a way that I never dreamed possible. And happily, we treated it as a new show, as a new piece, and I kept my mouth shut about what worked and didn't work in the past and -- because I wanted to give him free reign to come up with and create and also give myself the opportunity to rethink a lot of what I had known in the past.

So I think I'm going to stop now and start answering questions because I know there are a few. And I'm sure we'll get into a lot of issues about the show and its relevance, et cetera. And we'll just get on with that.

So how do we do this? You're going to hand them to me or you're going to read them?

MR. SALANT: I will read them and you can answer them.

MR. BAKULA: All right.

MR. SALANT: Let's start off. Jeff Calhoun has said that he was inspired to do "Shenandoah" first performed at the end of the Vietnam War because the United States is engaged in another war overseas. How has this affected the performance of you and the other cast members?

MR. BAKULA: Well, when you're doing a piece and your opening song has words, lyrics such as, "Someone rights a slogan, someone raises a flag, someone finds an enemy to blame," it's hard

not to be -- overwhelmed isn't really the right word, but consumed by that thought. And at the end of the piece -- and its relevance.

And at the end of the piece, I'm singing again, but the lyrics are, "North or South, they're all our children, born in flesh and in joy and in pain."

And philosophically, the way I live my life and as our world gets smaller and smaller, I truly do believe that the planet -- in the planet we are all brothers and sisters and they are all our sons and daughters, regardless of race, background, where they live on the planet, what their economic position is.

So the idea that this musical was written years ago and then from a movie, which was before we were in Vietnam, but certainly came out of a philosophy about war, it's -- everyone of us involved in the show -- and everyone: that means everybody at the Ford's Theatre -- the idea to do the show, we have been very much bent on this mission of presenting an idea, an image, notions and philosophies that people in an audience can take with them and talk about outside. And that to me is the best kind of theater, when you are not -- it's not preaching.

My character is tremendously flawed and makes mistakes. I had a little 11-year-old girl from New York City last night outside the theater. She should be on a TV show. But she said, "By the way, why did you shoot that guy?" And her little 13-year-old friend said, "Because he killed his son." And that was their moment. And I said, you know, you don't have time for me to tell you why I shot that man and the ramifications. But the idea that those two young women were talking about that after the piece is just one small way that the show has impacted audiences, and hopefully will continue to.

MR. SALANT: How close are your own views when it comes to Charlie's when it comes to war?

MR. BAKULA: Well, Charlie's views about war are complicated, more so than mine. I'm not a fan of war in any form. He has a line in the play where his son says, "So some fights suit you and some don't" -- excuse the grammar, but it's correct for them. And he says, "I'll fight any man who gives me provocation, but I'm not about to go out and hunt down strangers. And that's what war is, boys -- open season on strangers."

He then is provoked, later in the piece, into an emotional response that involves picking up a gun and killing a stranger who has just accidentally shot his own son. I would like to think that I would not do something like that.

So ironically, in my career, I've played interesting characters. I played a New York City -- based on a true story -- New York City policeman who was against the death penalty at a time when if you killed a policeman in New York, you were eligible for the death penalty, and he didn't believe that. And I got to meet him and spend a lot of time with him. And I did that piece because I believed likewise.

So I think that's where we mostly differ. I would like to think that, presented with the same situation, I would not have responded in kind.

Ironically, in the movie -- in the original inception of this piece -- Charlie did not kill that sniper. And you have to talk with Phil -- Phil Rose and Peter Udell and Gary Geld as to why they made a choice to change that when they mounted this on stage, because they made a dramatic choice to have Charlie pick up the rifle and kill this young man.

I've done productions where, for instance, when John Raitt said, "I'm not going to do that either." I don't want to be -- I want to go back to the movie version. I don't want to kill him on stage, and those are all choices.

When Jeff and I first started talking about it, he said, "Are you okay with shooting this -- doing this ending the way they did it on Broadway?" And I said yes. And I probably could have argued and fought and said, no, I'm not going to do that. And I don't know what the outcome would have been. But I feel that this character's humanity and his response is valuable to look at as a community. And it helps -- it helped me have more room in my heart for all of the challenges that we face in our country right now. So as you can tell, I don't always give short answers.

MR. SALANT: How did you prepare for the role? Did you read books on the Civil War or how did you decide -- how did you prepare for the position?

MR. BAKULA: My biggest challenges was to un-prepare for the role, because I knew it so well. I knew it through the eyes of four other wonderful, wonderful actors and I had to try to get them out of my head. I did research more on the physical approach of who these people were, what they looked like -- hence my look -- and I spent time with that. I spent time with a wonderful dialect coach, because we're in the backyard here, so to speak, and I didn't want to show up doing a bad Virginia accent with everyone here knowing exactly what that was. So Jessica Drake (sp), who's a wonderfully gifted dialectician in L.A., started me on that. So that was a lot of preparation.

And then more than anything, I spent time singing. And this is -- again, the last time I did a long-running musical was 18-years ago. I've done short things in the interim: Kennedy Center Honors a couple of times, and Carnegie Hall and some benefits and some things like that. But to be prepared to do this show eight times a week with the emotional drain and vocal necessities that it involves, I really went into training, vocal training. And by the end, I was singing up to two hours a day. And that's a philosophy that my voice teachers, who are still singing beautifully at 94 and 89 respectively -- I listened to them. And they have steered me very well. So that was most of my training. And then I like to just let it happen.

MR. SALANT: What aspect of "Shenandoah" first compelled you to want to be a part of this play?

MR. BAKULA: Well, it was a job. (Laughter). A lot of years ago I was - it enabled me to call my parents after three days and say, I'm in New York. I've got a job. It's not as bad as it all seemed, hopefully.

What's really been wonderful to return to for the piece for me has been -- when I did it years ago, I was young. I played a couple of the brothers. I played Sam. I played every part in the ensemble

almost. But now I'm a father, and how that resonates in me. And I have a daughter of marrying age, as does Charlie, and he has to deal with that -- again, a very emotional, interesting journey to take as an actor. So those things have made the piece very personal to me.

And then at the end of the day -- sadly a year ago we all felt reasonably sure that we were going to be in a war still. And it felt like this was the place to remount this piece, this town at this time, and look at war and its effects from a different perspective, but parallel.

MR. SALANT: Having played one of the sons on "Shenandoah" earlier in your career, were you ever tempted to give the other cast members any advice or pointers? (Laughter.)

MR. BAKULA: Absolutely not. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: You alluded to the fact that both you and Charlie had daughters of marrying age. Your family, obviously, is very important to you. What other similarities do you share with this character?

MR. BAKULA: Well, I think as a parent, and as a parent today, one of my biggest challenges is, you know, allowing your children to grow up and allowing -- making choices about how of the world comes into your home. And this man was intent on -- if he could have built a wall around his land and kept everybody out, he would have done it. He had lost his wife 12 years earlier in childbirth and he didn't want to lose anybody else, and he was determined to not lose anyone else. And that notion of how much can you protect your family -- obviously, he tried and tried and the world came in anyway and altered his existence.

How much can we protect our kids today? It's something that I'm constantly dealing with -- what do they see on television, what movies do they see, what do they get on the computer, what, what. You know, all of these things that they're bombarded with that we weren't -- that I wasn't as a child. And unfortunately, I feel that we are sadly off course in terms of what these kids get, what's on a billboard that they read, what people put on their bumper stickers.

You know, now my 6-year-old is reading everything and he's like, yeah, well, drive faster. Let's just drive right by that bumper sticker. Or my 15 year old is saying well, how could they say that about our president on the back of their car, you know? And I say, well, that's the good and the bad and the beauty of this country is that they can put that on their car, and you can put what you want on your car, and they're not going to go to jail, and we can have a rally in the Mall with 500,000 people seeking amnesty. And I was walking my 15 year old through that trying to explain to him what's that all about.

I'm wandering. But that's the biggest similarity that I see that he and I wrestle with is how much do you expose your kids to, when do you let them go on their own, when is it right, is it ever right, how can you -- how do you not be a controlling parent, manipulating, and yet at the same time, how can you help your kids in a very difficult journey in today's world?

MR. SALANT: This questioner writes in, "My husband served in Desert Storm and my son went to Iraq on our second time in. Both see their service to their country as an honor, but neither thinks this war is right. Do you personally see this as an ethical conflict?"

MR. BAKULA: I think there is a great passion to serve this country and -- for all of us. And we all do our part to serve in many different ways. I support every person -- every man, woman and child that are involved in our armed forces, wherever they are. That is a job that they do, they do for us. I think it is possible to support them and care for them and give them every ounce of our appreciation when we see them and when we read about them. This young girl amputee on the cover of the Post yesterday. I looked at it four times, because I thought it was a -- didn't look -- it looked surreal to me.

How can your heart not go out to her and to her family and to everyone that's affected by what her journey was and what it'll be for the rest of her life? And I think, at the same time, you can disagree with a policy or a decision that's made above all of that and here in this town or in the rooms in this town where those kinds of decisions are made.

I believe that it's possible to support -- and I think it's very important that we support all of our troops wherever they are. And I empathize and sympathize for any of them who are in conflict, but I so appreciate their devotion. I think it's critical for them to be 100 percent behind their commanding officers and supportive of fellow men and women that they serve with. There has to be a trust, because they are in harm's way -- whether we are at war or not, they are always in potential harm's way.

So I applaud these two and everyone out there. And I wish them all a speedy journey home and an end to this and to this kind of choice on this planet. We just -- we don't have that many years left, with our environment the way it is, to keep messing around. There are so many things that we need to get to. And this is one that would be best put behind us.

MR. SALANT: What has it meant for you and the cast to be performing the show in the theater where Lincoln was shot? What thought went through your mind when you performed on April 14th, the anniversary of his assassination?

MR. BAKULA: Well, I won't tell you all of my thoughts, but I was looking over my shoulder a lot that night. I kept thinking, okay, they've got the doors locked, nobody has any keys. There's -- plastic -- that's not very -- well, that's pretty strong stuff. It was very eerie, very odd, and I was very happy that our show ends before -- is it 10:15 or 10:14?

MR. : Ten-fifteen.

MR. BAKULA: Ten-fifteen. We were out long before then, and I was happy to be gone.
(Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: What is different in this play from your earlier versions of "Shenandoah"?

MR. BAKULA: Well, there are so many things that are different, but conceptually, an overall feeling of there's a different weight to the piece. In the '70s -- those of you who are familiar with the musical theater, we were coming out of the '60s, which was a lighter, "Fiddler-on-the-Roofy" kind of time -- not that's a light show. But we were -- it just -- the musical theater was transitioning -- "Chorus Line"; at the end of the '70s there was "Hair." There were just things changing, but this was kind of -- I think because of the source material was still a part of an older feeling kind of show, more traditional.

So Jeff's job -- and he succeeded wonderfully -- was to kind of make the show feel more today. Obviously, you can't change -- it still has to take place in the Civil War, so it's a period piece, but he had to make it for today's audience. And by that, there's an audience that expects certain things. You expect things to flow. You expect it to move. You don't really want, you know, a scene to end in blackout and then sit for, you know, 10 or 15 seconds while they change the scenery. So he had a much more cinematic approach to the piece. And with that came this emotional kind of relentless drive to the end, which I think has infused it with just a different kind of weight and a seriousness.

The opening number -- at the end the men are shot and they die on stage, but they stay on stage, which they never did before. And they are lying in their own pools of blood while my family is having morning Sunday breakfast, talking about the war, but with the sense that the war is going on all around them. There are dead bodies all around them, and literally, I get to a point and I say: "The dream has turned to ashes; the wheat has turned to straw. Someone asked the question, what was the dying for?" I can't speak without the dialect now -- (laughter) -- "the living can't remember" -- and at that point, these bodies rise, stand up -- "and the dead no longer care, but next time it won't happen upon my soul, I swear." And they march up and -- while this is all happening.

So he just did a great job of really weaving the story and layering it and moving it along. Also something audiences like today is to -- let's have that theatrical experience but not do three hours of "Camelot," which those were long, old shows, wonderful, but three hours at least. So he did many, many things. But overall, that was it.

MR. SALANT: What have you personally heard from the man on the street, or at least at the stage door, about the message "Shenandoah" has for our nation?

MR. BAKULA: Well, the gratifying thing is -- I told you earlier about the two young ladies last night. Last Saturday night I shook hands with a young man who just returned from seven months in Iraq. And he was very moved by the piece and very grateful to have returned in one piece from Iraq, but was very involved, again, with being in the war, not necessarily wanting to be in the war. So we had those kinds of responses.

There are times when you start hearing people sobbing about five minutes, 10 minutes into the second act and they never stop. And you always kind of just want to reach out from the stage and hug them and hold them for a minute. But the show has deeply moved people and entertained. And one of my early bosses in this business, Don Bellisario, who produced and created "Quantum Leap" -- many people in the beginning were saying, well, the show is about this and

it's about that. And oh my goodness, all the parallels. And he said, no, no, no, no. We're just entertaining here. This is just about entertainment.

And I used to laugh at that, but I think what he always meant to say was we can't lose our place and our sight of what we do. This is a wonderful evening in the theater. There's tremendous joy; there's beautiful music, tremendous dancing -- all the things that you would expect when you go to see a musical. And then where it goes and what you take from it becomes everyone's individual choice, just as it was in "Quantum Leap." If you wanted to see parallels in your own life and things that had happened to you or pull something out of it that was great -- and certainly, many, many, many people did.

But at the end of the hour of television, at the end of our two hours in the theater, we set out to entertain.

But it's been a great and varied response, but overwhelmingly enthusiastic -- and overwhelmingly enthusiastic that this piece is being done in D.C. at that theater, at the Ford's Theatre, at this time, for all parties, for all different groups. It's not just only, you know, if you're against the war and you're a Democrat, or whatever, you're going to love this show. It's not that at all. And that's really what's been most gratifying for me is that we've provoked conversation in all walks of life.

MR. SALANT: Another actor once played a role in a movie about the South during the -- during civil rights in the '50s, in the height of racial tension. He confessed later that he had no idea of the reality of the situation. What are the actors' responsibilities to know their characters' motives?

MR. BAKULA: Well, I think -- I'm kind of curious now about who that was. (Laughter.) It's your job. (Chuckles.) I don't know how to -- you have to investigate and explore, and then you create, usually, a fictional character that has groundings in reality and it makes sense in your own body and in your own voice. That to me is the joy of the work, the rehearsal process and discovering who -- and finding that character. So I'm not sure what it would be like to do a part where you had no idea who the person was. So it's hard for me to relate to that question. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: With your commitment to "Shenandoah" winding down, what else do you have on your plate?

MR. BAKULA: Back for baseball coaching for my 10-year-old son. (Laughter.)

I'm not sure. I'm looking for more theater to do. It's been -- again, it's been 18 years, so I wanted to see how I felt about doing theater after 18 years. You get into a certain rhythm out in California, and a rhythm of the movies and TV world. It's not like the theater. For the most part, it's a much more pampered existence, so to speak. Your lifestyle on the set and the time, the way you're treated is just different, which ultimately is why you find that many, many people that have come up through the theater are people that are a little bit more -- have a different sense about who they are, what they do, how they approach their work -- because it's not -- you get special treatment out there, which isn't necessarily good.

But I'm looking forward to doing more theater. I love doing theater in this town. I was at the Ford's Theatre in 1979, and haven't been back since. But now I'm here, and I love being reintroduced to this community. This theater community is wonderful and vital. And I was just at the Helen Hayes Awards the other night and was very impressed with the whole -- that whole production and the whole group here in D.C.

So I'd love to come back here and do something. I'd love to come to New York and do something, and so we'll see. But theater's kind of on my plate right now, but I don't know what.

MR. SALANT: Where in TV and the movies, you flub a scene, they say "cut" and they re-do it, you can't do that on stage. What's that like, as an actor?

MR. BAKULA: There are times I've wanted to. You have to kind of just move on through. When you really -- the things that go through your head when you're on stage are frightening sometimes. And I think that's been one of my biggest challenges, being away from it for so long, is really trying to find a way to focus and block out information that comes in from everywhere. And whether it's, you know, a kid that I can see in the front row who has, you know, got his feet up on the kid next to him, on the chair, and the kid next to them is asleep, and it's, you know, you want to kind of reach out and go, "Wake up!" (Laughter.) Or whether something happens offstage, or the gun doesn't work, or who's out there tonight that came down to see the show, or - there are so many things that you have to really fight against.

You know, last night my microphone got twisted and it was off my face, and I was in the middle of my longest, biggest song in the show thinking, man, I just -- I just don't have it tonight. It just doesn't sound right. And I'd kind of choked right before I'd gone out, and I -- I had this little drink that I was drinking, and I was choking and trying to get changed and go out. And then I came off stage and the sound guy was there and he was fixing my mike, and I said, was that it? And he said, yeah. I said, oh, good, I'm glad. (Laughter.) I thought it was me! And he said, yeah, the guy in the booth thought you were holding back tonight. I said, no, I was killing myself! (Laughter.)

So there are many things that go through your mind, and shutting those out -- that's been the biggest challenge for me, finding that discipline to be there with the person you're working with, and be there for the first time. That's not hard. I love that about the theater. Everybody says, "How can you do the same show over and over again?" This is the actor -- TV, film actors. "It must be so boring." It's never the same. Your day's never the same. How you feel physically is never the same. The person across from you is doing something that they've never done before, the audience is totally different. It's hot in the theater, and you're sweating, and it's like, what happened to the air conditioning? Or it's -- there are all these different things, so it's never the same. And the journey with the audience every night is different, and you never -- you never know until you go out there how it's going to be, and then you start to -- this dance that goes on for two hours, with the audience. And if it's an audience that's not there, then you're like, all right, how can I coax them and get them and get them to -- maybe a little laugh here and maybe a little bit there, and then oh, no, there's more there; no, they liked that. And then you -- it's this wonderful, collaborative time that you have that you're all kind of creating this moment in this theater that will never be repeated and is shared just by that group, and you -- and then you do it

all over again. And so it's very vital and very challenging, and this part is both of those things. But it's -- I've had a ball doing it.

MR. SALANT: Could you please comment on the state of television today? (Laughter.) This questioner writes, "Isn't there more programming than ever that appeals to the lowest common denominator? Do we get what we deserve, or are the networks letting us down? (Pause; laughter.)

MR. BAKULA: Wow. Well, the networks are selling commercials and they're trying to make money. So I don't think -- and they answer to boards of directors and owners of companies now that own these networks, and they're concerned with the bottom line. And so if you approach it from a business standpoint, it's hard to blame the networks for trying to make money, because that's what their job is. Les Moonves is trying to make money for CBS and Viacom and all those things, and he's doing an unbelievable job at that. So you can't say, Les, you've let -- who has he let down? Every shareholder and person involved from a financial point in that world is very happy.

It's the old chicken-or-the-egg thing. Is the country crying out for more reality shows, and that's why we're giving it to them? Is the country crying out for -- is the audience crying out for a different kind of humor or more crass or more suggestive or -- it's a free -- it used to be all free. And you have to remember that also. And people had limited choices. Now, if you look at what free television represents and who's watching free television, then you're -- it's a tricky, tricky trade-off. Because yes, you want to stimulate. And every year -- believe me, every year, every network is looking for challenging, exciting, wonderful, stimulating television. They are all out there; they all have scripts. They're not saying, bring me, you know, something that -- they're all -- and they're looking for that in their reality show. They're looking for that in their, you know, their nightly news. They're looking for that everywhere. But what sticks, ultimately, is determined by what -- who watches those little Nielsen boxes, and that little mystery, (vagary ?) is a challenge for all of us who are involved in the business.

But the time of let's stay with a show and see if it works and wait it out -- "Quantum Leap" never should have made it past its first six episodes, if it wasn't for some very determined network executives at the time and some very determined fans, who are still very determined, from all around the country who wouldn't let the show go away. It never would make it today. And a huge chunk of my career is based on episode six that aired on a Wednesday night, and people tuned in to watch and they said, well, let's give them another season. And we were off.

It's whimsical. It's definitely a shot in the dark, and yet people are knocking down the doors to make television, to write their scripts, to be on TV, to -- it's tremendously powerful, tremendously misused. And again, at the bottom line -- and this is true throughout our business: in the television and film world -- the business is now run by corporations. And I'm not saying this in a bad way at all. That's just the way the world is. And because of that, there's a different set of rules that are in place. And I know that Sumner Redstone passed down a little edict about a year and half ago that any division of Paramount that wasn't making money by such-and-such a date would be closed, and that was it. And one of the things that got closed, for instance, was the costume department that has costumes from every Paramount movie from forever. That's a

museum, and it's gone. It's wiped out -- the prop department at Paramount. So now they have to go out, when you're getting a prop at Paramount, and go somewhere else -- go to Universal to get their costumes, go to Warner Brothers to get their props. But that's what -- that's what the business is.

So it's hard to say you can blame this person or blame that person. It's just kind of a product of our times.

Another short answer. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: Speaking of "Quantum Leap," any plans for a movie?

MR. BAKULA: Never heard that question before. (Laughter.)

No. (Laughter.) Not at this time.

MR. SALANT: A subject near and dear to my heart: Were you a fan of the original "Star Trek" and its sequels before you got the role as starship captain of the NX Enterprise?

MR. BAKULA: Yes, I was. When I was in college, they were re- running it every night, five days a week. And it was Tom Snyder and then -- I think Tom Snyder was first, and then "Star Trek." And we just -- that was college life. Instead of studying, we were watching Tom and Captain Kirk, and learning from both of them. (Laughter.) So I loved it back then. Never dreamed -- people always say, well, did you ever think you'd be a -- no, never; never crossed my mind. And the good news was I got to do the prequel, so I got to be in front of everybody. I wasn't following everybody. Early on, there were postcards made up in England, and it was a picture of me -- now I'll see if I'm going to get into the story and not be able to finish it. And it said Kirk's -- what was it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

MR. BAKULA: Thank you. (Laughter.) "Captain Kirk's childhood hero." Thank you. I'm so glad you're here. (Laughter.) And I loved that. I just thought that that was so cool, because I did love that series. And unfortunately, Mr. Shatner hasn't gone on to anything else since then. (Laughter). But if anybody wants me to do any promos for any Internet companies, I'll be happy to. (Laughter).

MR. SALANT: As an actor, what is it like to take a role like Jonathan Archer of "Star Trek" that'll help define you for the rest of your career?

MR. BAKULA: (Laughs; laughter.) Well, I think, first of all, it was daunting just to be a part of the franchise. When we started, it was a 35-year-old franchise; now it's plus-six years. So that in itself is amazing. And you think -- well, you know that it's going to be around for -- with the world now, it's going to be around for as long as people are still collecting or reviewing things in that manner.

I felt all right about taking this -- taking the role on because I came to it with a certain amount of celebrity, if you will, and so that becoming a part of this franchise and becoming a "Star Trek" captain wasn't the only thing that I would be known for. And I had a reputation; I had a history before I burst onto the scene flying that ship. So I wasn't that worried about it. I was mostly worried about living up to what had come before, and not letting the millions of fans around the planet down, because you definitely feel that pressure, as a performer, that you want to continue in that tradition and yet be your own captain and create your own environment and your own relationships with your crew and do your own thing. That's very important to me, so we tried to do all of that.

I won't tell you all the events that led to us not being around anymore, but many of them happened in a way way out of our control. We still had four great years, and so it was a blast.

MR. SALANT: From the other captains, who do you think you were most like? (Laughter.)

MR. BAKULA: You mean which ones -- which ones of them were most like me, you mean? (Laughter.) Yeah, I always got away with that because I could say, like, (that's it ?). Right? Right?

I would say that Kirk tried to be -- follow in my footsteps. (Laughter.) Yeah, see, I always got out of that question, because I would say, well, no, I was first, so they all followed me. (Light laughter.)

MR. SALANT: What hasn't been done in science fiction that you would like to do or see?

MR. BAKULA: Hmm. Well, I think that the great thing about science fiction, what's always been compelling to me, is that it opens up your imagination, it allows you to think about -- if it's science future-fiction, it allows you to view the potential and the possibilities in a different light than we are seeing them today. And so much of science fiction has become truth, as we all know. It really wasn't that long ago that we put someone on the moon, and now they're talking -- you know, I keep following all the things that they're doing, trying to do, at NASA, and so that future is very exciting.

What our industry can do in the TV and film world, I hope, is continue to put out positive ideas and things that younger people can grab onto about the future of this planet and where we can go and how we can live together, and how we can take what we learn here out into the universe, because I do believe that we'll -- hopefully -- get to do that someday. So it's very important, and it's very -- it's very -- these are very real problems. And because you can guise it under science fiction, you can talk about the environment in the future and the politics in the future and relationships in the future between countries, and racists, et cetera, and allow us the notion that we can have this "Star Trek" vision of a world where we don't see color anymore, we don't see country anymore, we're all here for one reason. And that's something that our industry can continue to put out and what "Star Trek" has done for so many -- so many, many years.

MR. SALANT: Your response to a question during a recent chat with The Washington Post -- you said -- I'm quoting now -- "My main concern about being a role model is more in my

everyday life -- how I lead my life, my relationship with my children, their friends, and the community that I live in. I think it's important for everyone to feel a responsibility to the younger people on the planet, and I set out to lead by example and not by any grand design." The questioner writes, "Based on your experiences, what specific things would you suggest for those who find these thoughts inspiring?"

MR. BAKULA: Read the -- read the last part again? (Laughter.) I never should have said it. (Chuckles.)

MR. SALANT: "I think it's important for everyone to feel a responsibility to the younger people on the planet, and I set out to lead by example and not by any grand design."

MR. BAKULA: Now read the question.

MR. SALANT: Based on your experiences, what specific things would you suggest for those who find these thoughts inspiring?

MR. BAKULA: Well, what I think is happening to the detriment of -- and this is where TV does play what I think is -- we were just talking about this -- not a good role in our world today. We are creating this, at times -- and certainly some of the reality shows are creating this -- this desire for a lot of people to want to be celebrities, or their 15 minutes of fame, or do anything to get noticed. And when I say those kinds of things, I'm saying let's honor, let's say -- let's forget about people like me who do this for a living -- let's honor the school teachers, let's honor the firemen, let's honor the people in the political landscape in your local community. Let's make those things that we can present to our kids and say, look how important it is; this is what's important -- the nurses at the hospital, the people that are doing volunteer work for all these things. Those are the people that to me are -- that I try and honor and respect and show to my children how important they are, because we're losing sight of the fabric of what makes this country and then, conversely, this world wonderful and special, and what makes us great at human beings and different from the animals on the planet. Because we're getting this animalistic thing about let's get famous, let's get -- you know, give me my time in the sun.

And the real work and the people that are doing this relentlessly and don't give up and aren't getting attention, they're the heroes and they're the people that I try to tell my kids, let's grow up to be like that person, let's grow up to think about I want to do that, you know, to contribute to what goes on in my world. Because we need all those people. It's not -- you know, everybody can't be famous and -- happily, they're not. They're people that are out there living their own lives. You know, it's not a thousand points of light; it's the millions and billions of points of light that are all valuable. And what's going on in China has relevance to what's going on over here, and we have to start -- everybody has to start understanding that.

MR. SALANT: Before I ask my last question, I wanted to give you the coveted National Press Club coffee mug. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. BAKULA: Thank you. Thank you very much. I drink coffee, so this is a very good thing.

MR. SALANT: And a certificate of appreciation.

MR. BAKULA: Thank you.

MR. SALANT: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Last question. Got a request from the audience. Will you please sing a few lines of your closing song from "Shenandoah?" (Laughter, applause.)

MR. BAKULA: I gotta do it? (Laughs.) Couldn't I sing "Happy Birthday?" Isn't it anybody's birthday today or something?

I only do that if everybody here has bought a ticket and seen the show -- (laughter) -- otherwise, you have to say -- is that a good answer, Paul?

MR. : (We'd ?) have to pay royalties.

MR. BAKULA: (Laughs.) Oh, the last song. The last song is not a song to sing. Let's see. Let me see if I can think of something from -- I know, because, man, at 2:00, that -- it's over.

I guess I'll just reiterate that -- what I was saying before. The dream has turned to ashes, the wheat has turned to straw -- (singing) -- and someone asked the question what was the dyin' for? The graves are filled with answers, each one just and true. For all men finally reason, what else could I do?

Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: I'd like to thank everyone for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze, and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the Press Club's Eric Friedheim Library for its research. We're adjourned.

(Raps gavel.) (Applause.)

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