

The Allspark Interviews Legend Frank Welker

Contributed by Kalidor
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The Allspark was very excited to have the opportunity recently to interview legendary voice actor and Transformers fan favorite Frank Welker. Frank is best known for...well, all SORTS of roles, including Scooby-Doo, Nibbler from Futurama, Megatron, and so many more. Click below for a message from Megatron, and then read on for a glimpse into his life and his possible involvement with the upcoming movie! Click Above to Hear a Special Message From Megatron himself!

Allspark: How does it feel to be regarded as the top male voice performer in the whole world? (And by the way, your resume is....daunting, to say the least.)
 Frank: Well, I think you are being far too kind. But it is nice to know there are some folks out there that may be aware of my work. I think I was very lucky to have been employed consistently since the day I got into the biz; maybe that is why I have the numbers I do. I don't know about being the "top male voice performer in the world," but I know my agency has started validating my parking!
 Mel Blanc was described as the "man of 1000 voices". What number would you believe is accurate for you?
 First, let me say that Mel Blanc was the father of voice animation. He created indelible characters that were so powerful...almost everything he did is now an icon. As to the numbers of voices I do, I really have never counted so I can't honestly say. I know over a period of 35 years I have created enough characters to drive my friends crazy! With your extensive volume of work, do you find that it is easier to get roles, or do you still have to audition just like everyone else? To be honest, it is a little of both. A lot of the casting people and producers who know me will request me or just cast me. But, on the other hand, there are quite a few I have to audition for...which isn't necessarily a bad thing. I actually enjoy auditioning, that is the time I get to experiment and hopefully read for different characters.
 What would you say or what advice would you give to anyone trying to follow in your footsteps? Wash your hands and be careful not to step in anything. It is important to be clear in your mind what you are trying to achieve. I started out in the business doing plays in college, then commercials, then stand up, then on camera both feature and TV acting, then producing and writing, and of course voice acting. Actually, during all of that I was going back and forth from one medium to the other but voices were always very good to me and eventually took over. Sounds a little like, "All about Eve" doesn't it? That being said, if one is interested in getting into voice work...then, practice reading aloud, listen to how people talk and sound (in my case animals) watch old movies and let your imagination go. Be honest with yourself and the assessment of your abilities. Be prepared for rejection and lots of criticism. Hey don't get me wrong it is a fabulous gig and sure beats shoveling coal...I think, I have actually never shoveled coal.
 Can you tell us about how you handle frustrating jobs, when you struggle to get a voice right, or the environment/people in the studio are less than pleasant? One of the benefits of longevity and a certain amount of success, is having the luxury of turning down things I think may be unpleasant. I used to accept every job that came along, now I look for more fun projects. Some of the throat rippers I will pass on or if I know the director overdirects or they want to spend too much time doing work I know can be done quickly, I will pass. But overall, most sessions are enjoyable and relatively painless...that's for me. Now the other side of the equation...well that is a different thing all together, you will have to ask them about the pain I put them through.
 Your resume is 90% animal sounds and background voices. Did you choose this path, or was this something that sort of came upon you? I seem to be known for my animal stuff, but I still do a lot of vocals including Freddy on "Scooby Doo." The animal thing just happened to be something I did that was an added premium when the studio hired me. If it came down to hiring two guys or me, they figured they could have me do the farmer and his dog, or the cowboy and his horse and his cow! Then it just grew, it got so people would only ask me to do animals. I remember June Foray saying to me at a "Hysteria" session, "Don't they know you do more than just sounds?" In reality, I do quite a bit of everything but a dog or cat or an animal of some kind is in almost every show, it's job insurance to cover the pets. Do you have any characters you've really struggled with or didn't enjoy doing? Off the top of my head I can't recall names of any characters, but I know there were some. Usually this happens when a director or producer paints you into a corner. I think most of my peers will agree that an actor's initial instinct is going to have the most power and conviction, and the more folks mess with you the less performance they are going to get. As an example, someone tells you they want kind of a "Woody Allen" with a "French" accent, and a lisp but not cartoony, fat but not Michael Moore...well you can see the problem. Mark Evanier is a great director, in my opinion, because he gets actors he likes to work with and then lets them do their thing. He writes the script so you would

think he would be very protective of every word, but he encourages us to bring life to his characters and script by adlibbing or making suggestions. More and more, actors are pretty much type cast, you are called in to do the same thing, which is okay....after all that is our job.

It's quite obvious that you're not struggling for work in this business. If there was a role you thought you wouldn't enjoy, are there circumstances in which you would take that role anyway? I did a show not too long ago that at first I was loving...then I noticed I was being directed toward the sound of another character I do on a competing show. I felt very awkward about that. I don't like to repeat voices and try to steer away from doing that...but sometimes it just happens. It happened to Mel Blanc with Sylvester and Daffy but it didn't really matter because both are fabulous and hysterical...but they do sound a bit like cousins. I have done my deep voice (Barry White) for several shows. Dr. Claw, in "Inspector Gadget" and the cave of Wonders in "Aladdin." You just hope they air far enough apart in time or they are on the opposite end of the viewing dial!

Are there any projects you've auditioned for that you really wanted but didn't get? Did you have a different take on the character that you feel might have been a better match than what ended up being used? Yes, and Billy West got them all !!!!!!! He is a talented nut...I really enjoy watching and working with him. But yes, it is after all, a business and we are competing for a limited amount of roles. Unlike some businesses though, we wish each other well and recommend one another for roles. I would not be doing Nibbler in, "Futurama" if it hadn't been for Tress MacNeille...she literally hounded the director until he would see me. If you had to do it all over again, would you still be a voice actor, or would you prefer to have taken more on-screen roles? One great thing about vo acting is that you can do so many different roles and in such a short period of time. It is truly an actor's sand box. I think that may be why a lot of the on camera people enjoy it so much. I really wish I could have been a dramatic on camera actor, but I just didn't have the chops. I can do it behind the mike but not in front of the camera. I can drop my pants in front of 100,000 people on stage but Hamlet escapes me. That is what I mean by taking stock of your abilities. Very early in my career, I went over to CBS to read for the casting folks as a young cowboy who had been shot and was dying. I tried so hard and in the middle of my death scene they all started laughing, that is when I realized I had better stick with comedy. What is your preference, recording solo in a studio or having the cast record together in an ensemble? It depends, if you have a group of experienced vo actors and a director who knows the script and it is an ensemble happening, that is heaven. But most of the time, I would prefer just to go in and do it. There is far too much time wasted in name of creativity. If you are on the ball, there is absolutely no reason you can't get in and out of sessions with or without a full cast. Most full length features are done solo. I was the prince's monkey Abu in "Aladdin" and never saw the prince or Robin Williams in the three years it took us to record it. Solo, you can concentrate on your part, do three quick takes without interruption and it usually works out so much better than talking about how the monkey suffered from a difficult childhood. Of course if they asked me to voice Paris Hilton's dog, I would insist on recording with the cast! What does the real Frank sound like? Which roles are the closest to your actual voice? I wish I could say Sean Connery, but nope...Freddy Jones. I sound like Freddy but a little lower. What roles do you get the most fan attention for? Are you "known" in the industry for any specific roles? I guess by default it would be, "Scooby Doo" the show. I have been Freddy for 35 years and since Don Messick, the wonderfully talented Scooby left us I have taken over that role which comes with a lot instant recognition. I thought about trying to stay anonymous but that hasn't happened so now I accept it and enjoy it all. Probably, Jabberjaw..the Shmoo, Baby Kermit , and Megatron are still popular...but a lot of folks go nuts when they find out I was the Gopher in "Caddyshack!" You voiced a multitude of Transformers characters - which one do you feel you enjoyed doing the most? Megatron!

The animated Transformers movie was devastating to small children who watched their hero, Optimus Prime, die at the hands of Megatron (not to mention a lot of favorite characters). Did you ever get any negative feedback for being the voice of the character who killed Optimus Prime? No, not really. You know I never really knew too much about our fan base until some of you let me know what was going on. I had been invited to several Botcons but haven't made it yet. I was going to go with Peter Cullen a couple of years back but had to cancel at the last minute. He's more upset with me for that than the fact that I killed him. Seriously, we had no control over the script and even less over the feature. I was disappointed in the feature for a lot of reasons, but I am sorry to hear that it was not more positive for the younger fans.

You voiced Megatron's upgraded form, Galvatron, in the cartoon. However, in the movie, that character was voiced by Leonard Nimoy. Do you recall your feelings about having someone else brought in to voice what was in some senses still "your" character? Likewise, what were your feelings about performing Galvatron for the cartoon AFTER the movie? Did you know you would be taking this role after the movie? I was never too crazy with Galvatron anyway so having an actor like Leonard doing it was fine. I was very happy with Megatron. In the series, I didn't agree with the choice of replacing those of us that created the voices with new voices from Canada, but it is a business and the powers that be make decisions they feel are necessary. But no, I didn't know that I would be doing the role of Galvatron after the film. Can you discuss your involvement with the upcoming Transformers movie? Since you've auditioned, tell us what process you went through, and how you were contacted about it. How did the fans demand for your audition make you feel? I got a call a while back to meet with Mike Bay and others but our schedules didn't mesh. Then I got a call from the agency saying the studio would like to hear some Meg tracks. So we laid down a few lines and sent them in. Later there was a

request for me to do kind of a brief improv for two very nice casting folks but none of the producers were present. I think they are still split on how they would like to go with Megatron. If they do decide to use me, I may not hear from them until post production. I usually work at the end of the production, putting a voice to what the director has created. It works great that way because I can see what he wants, it's right there on the screen. That is always a blast for me...to be left alone in a dark studio with the picture and go for it! As to the FANS, I can't say enough about them. First, I had no idea how many and how loyal they are...there is no doubt that the guys at the studio want to do this project right and they want the fans to be happy. They will do their own thing which they should, but they do listen to the fans and that is a credit to them and to the power of the people! Considering that the person behind the voice is usually always shrouded, and the fame does not come in the same form as a TV or Film actor, what is the voice actors legacy? He came, he saw, he barked. Steel cage match time: Fred from Scooby Doo vs. Megatron. Bets? These two guys have been around a long time....they are tough, sly, and motivated. Megs has the edge unless he gets between Fred and Daphne... Is there anything you would like to say to the many fans of your work in Transformers? Again, I want to thank all of you for being opinionated, loyal, and supportive in your concerns about everything [related to Transformers]. I have just started reading the blog's...wow! Transformers was a fun show to do and I particularly enjoyed working with my buddies Peter Cullen, the talented Mike Bell, Scatman Crothers, Chris Latta, and the rest of the fabulous cast. We took great pleasure in working with each other in some very long sessions trying to get it right. I don't think any of us ever had any idea that so many of you would be interested and appreciative of our efforts. I loved doing Megatron, he was my distraction from all the soft furry creatures and dads and uncles and family dogs I did day in and day out. It makes me happy knowing you were pleased that I was....good at being "bad." Thank you my friends! Megatron, Leader of the Decepticons!The Allspark and it's staff would like to thank Frank for taking time out of his busy schedule to talk with us. We and all of his fans at the Allspark wish him great success with all his endeavors.