

## Allspark.com Interview with Transformers Prime's Steve Blum!

Contributed by NightViper  
Monday, 25 April 2011

The Allspark.com recently had the chance to send a few questions the way of Steve Blum, voice actor for Transformers Prime! The voice of Starscream had plenty to say; be it stories from the recording booth, his own personal history of his voice acting career, or just plain yelling of gibberish!

Read on to find out more about the voice behind everyone's favorite backstabbing Decepticon...Or should we say "Naughtycon"?

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Allspark.com: How did you get your start in voice acting?

Steve Blum: By accident, actually. I was working as a driver / mailroom-boy / P.A. / slave for a low-budget sci-fi film company. One day, my buddy Victor Garcia, the head of the mailroom and talented, but starving actor, told me he was casting a "Japanimation" dubbing project and asked me if I wanted to try out for it. Free food on a weekend to pretend I was a monster ripping the limbs off another monster? Hell yeah! He had me at food. I didn't think I was qualified, but couldn't pass up the opportunity for free grub and to meet some of his actor pals in some crazy treehouse (literally) recording studio and possibly get paid for it! I schlepped my inexperienced, terrified hiney to the studio. I tried out, got the gig, they hired me for 25 more episodes and eventually some human speaking roles, and I haven't stopped since. I was playing music at the time which seemed to make the rhythm of the dubbing to Japanese lip flaps come naturally. It took me 20 years to figure out the acting part. Totally bass-ackwards to the recommended methods of getting into the business, but I wasn't dying to be an actor, so I could take my time. Guess it worked out okay.

AS: When approaching a character such as Starscream, Wolverine, or any other icons in their respective franchise, do you look to previous interpretations for inspiration or do you try to make it your own, do something different to give it your own twist on the character?

SB: Since I'm not a classically trained actor — I always go with instinct first and finesse it after the fact. In the case of Transformers, I was familiar with the great Chris Latta and of course my pals Charlie Adler and Tom Kenny's versions. Those are some huge, talented shoes to fill, so I didn't even try to copy them. My process starts by listening carefully to the director's vision and if images of the character are available, I lock onto that. Then I just let my 5 year old imagination take over and simply let out what naturally occurs in my head. Most of the time, it's a great place to start. After that, the casting folks and/or director dials me in, and then I may add in some nuance that I steal from the previous guys — to honor their performances. In the case of Wolverine, my first job ever was to sort comics for my Grandfather's book store. Spending 8 hours a day, alone in a hot, dusty room filled with comics, I had a lot of imagined characters' voices pop into my skull. Wolverine's voice is the same one I've had in there since I was a kid. I just had to wait till my physical voice grew up enough and got deep enough to let it out!

AS: How has your experience been working on Transformers Prime with legendary voice actors such as Frank Welker and Peter Cullen?

SB: Two words. Fanboy heaven. (or should that be three?) Both of them are hysterically funny, massively talented and big-hearted, sweet humans to boot. I still get chills every time Peter opens his mouth, unhinges his jaw and vibrates the room with Optimus goodness, and Frank... wow — he's simply a V/O superhero. My favorite all-time voice actor, period. I've been a fan of his since I had any idea of what voiceover was! I first worked with Frank on an episode of What's New, Scooby Doo, and have been geeking out ever since. He was generous and kind from the first moment I met him. I consider him a role model and mentor whether he's aware of it or not! When Peter and Frank are in the room together, it is nothing short of humbling. Their relationship is like two ridiculously talented, funny brothers, who have shared a lifetime of laughter and memories with some of the biggest names in entertainment history. The most amazing thing is, that after all these years, and with all of their accomplishments, they're still humble, decent guys who seem just as grateful as the rest of us to be there working on a franchise we all love. Have I mentioned that I love them?

AS: If you could sum up your version of Starscream, how would you characterize him?

SB: Gotta give this one to Frank. He calls us "Naughtycons." I guess my Starscream would be the ultimate Naughtycon. He's dark, delusional, disrespected and very very cranky. I mean, for cri-yi-yi, first episode, he takes out one of the most beloved Autobots ever (Cliffjumper), played by one of the most beloved actors ever (Dwayne Johnson). And he only gets worse from there.

AS: You've garnered a following from your voice work, do you find your voice being recognized in your everyday life?

SB: Every once in a while at the bank, or in a grocery store, I'll see a quick head twist, a peaked eyebrow, or even a squeal. It's pretty funny and a bit jarring, because it always seems to happen so suddenly. And I unintentionally scared a little kid once in the toy aisle of Target shopping for my Green Goblin action figure. I did the voice for him and he ran to his mother who screamed at me, convinced I was a molester. Day to day, I live a basically anonymous life. Conventions are surreal - like being a rock star for a few days, but then I get to retreat to a very quiet, normal life when I come home.

AS: Any upcoming projects you're working on? Anything Transformers outside of Transformers Prime?

SB: I'm working on a ton of stuff at the moment, but as is usually the case, I'm not allowed to talk about most of it. I might be working on something Transformers, but by contract, I'd have to kill you and myself if I said anything more at the moment. Super Hero Squad has gone into a second season, but I think the network buried it in a 6:30 am timeslot. Kinda breaks my heart. We worked hard on that show. Check in with my website, <http://www.steveblumvoices.com/> for updates or my Imdb page (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0089710/>). They seem to have access to information for upcoming projects way before I do (or am allowed to talk about).

AS: In regards to Starscream in Transformers Prime, what can we look forward to for your character? Any chance of you lending your voice to any other characters in this series?

SB: All I'm allowed to say is that Starscream will suffer some pretty harsh consequences for his nasty behavior in upcoming episodes. Starscream haters and lovers alike will have a lot to chew on. New sides of him will be exposed that will satisfy the most deviant among you.

I always seem to do a little something extra in most episodes - usually Decepticon Troopers. I'm happy to do whatever characters they offer me. Again, not allowed to spill anything here tho. Lasers trained on temples. Snipers on the roof.

AS: What was your most challenging voice acting experience? What was your favorite voice acting experience?

SB: I'd say most technically challenging would have to be Wolverine - particularly in the "Hulk vs." movie. Growling, roaring and slashing with my bud Fred Tatasciore (the Hulk), is a brutal, soggy, painful (yet somehow sickly rewarding) experience. I don't think either of us could speak for a week after that one, even with the healing factor. Favorite? Hmm... hard to say. Kind of a toss up between pretty much any Super Hero Squad record and any Transformers: Prime session. Both casts feel like family.

AS: How do ensemble recordings vary to you (like on Transformers Prime) compared to solo recordings (like your work on Cowboy Bebop)?

SB: Completely different animal, but I love them equally. Especially on something like the Cowboy Bebop Movie, Spike was such a complicated character, that I liked having the time to flesh him out without feeling like I was holding up an entire ensemble. My director, the great Mary Elizabeth McGlynn, was incredibly dedicated to getting it right and understood the overall vision. It was unusual to be given (comparatively) so much time on an anime project. But even on the dubbing projects that I've had to crank out at full speed, I enjoy the technicality and the challenge of matching the lip flaps and bringing as much as I can to animation that can't be altered. That said, there's nothing like working in a room full of twisted, hilarious voice animals. In the dubbing world, I basically see my friends only in passing. On a show like Transformers, we have family time. As I said earlier, working with guys like Frank and Peter is crazy cool, but it's also amazing to watch masters like Kevin Michael Richardson (Bulkhead), Josh Keaton (Jack), Jeffrey Combs (Ratchet), Ernie Hudson (Fowler) and Daran Norris (Knockout) tear it up in there. And even more fun is to watch some of the relative v/o newcomers, like Andy Pessoa (Raf) (coolest kid ever), Tanya Gunadi (Miko) (So funny!! Seriously, she IS Miko) and Sumalee Montano (Arcee) dig into their characters and ultimately explode with astounding performances! I'm so proud of all of them! They're all amazing!! Just saw the "Predatory" episode. Freakin' tour de force for Sumalee! Holy scrap! Way to go, girl!

AS: You've played hero (Wolverine, Spike Spiegel, etc.) and villain (Starscream, Green Goblin, etc.) alike, which

kind of roles do you prefer, the hero or the villain?

SB: Ah, interesting examples&hellip; Wolverine and Spike are bad boys! Almost anti-heroes&hellip;not your basic squeaky-clean heroes like say, Superman. I rarely get to play those. I enjoy playing with the dark side of the human psyche. It&rsquo;s fun and therapeutic. Playing out anger and evil onscreen vents it from my own body, so I can be a nice guy in the real world. The nastiest villains take it to an even deeper, more delicious level. It just feels good to be bad. Clich , but accurate.

I do love to play straight up heroic too &ndash; especially in children&rsquo;s programming. I think my favorite of those would be Guilmon from the old Digimon series. Innocent, no agenda, no baggage&hellip; just trying to do the right thing&hellip; and eat snacks.

AS: Can you relate to any of the characters you&rsquo;ve played in particular? Is there a bit of Starscream in you?

SB: I guess I&rsquo;d be lying if I said there wasn&rsquo;t at least a slice of every character I play somewhere in me and vice-versa. I have to find something substantial to relate to when I take on a role, or it&rsquo;s impossible to give an honest performance. Whether it&rsquo;s behavior I&rsquo;ve personally exhibited or experienced in the real world, or just the normal twisted human thoughts that we all have, anything and everything is fare game in cartoons. I let it all out there, but make very conscious efforts to save some integrity for my earthly life.

AS: The Transformers franchise is very successful, how does it feel to be part of a franchise that is loved world-wide by young and old alike?

SB: Oh man. Not even possible to express with language! I am humbled and hugely grateful to be a part of the Cybertronian universe. I never take it for granted. I&rsquo;m a fan too and it&rsquo;s very important to me to do the best job I possibly can, for the fans, for my castmates and crewmates, for the animators, writers and producers and for everyone who has worked so hard to make this show great!

AS: Do you have any interesting or funny stories from your recording sessions on Transformers Prime or any of the other series you&rsquo;ve worked on?

SB: Most are not repeatable in family publications. (Laughs) However&hellip; A few weeks ago, Frank and Peter launched into a dead-on John Wayne and Walter Brennan verbal duel. It was so good and so funny, we thought it was something they&rsquo;d worked on for years! They know each other&rsquo;s timing so well, they can ad-lib their asses off and create an instant, perfect classic comedy duo on the spot. Who knew? We had front row seats!

Also, Kevin does an insanely funny one-man version of the entire 70&rsquo;s show &ldquo;My Three Sons,&rdquo; including the theme song &ndash; between takes. Random, right? Look it up, kiddies. And for the record, his &lsquo;Uncle Charlie&rsquo; is filthy. Peter literally laughed himself to tears on more than one occasion. Several of us peed.

And recently in a Starscream-heavy episode &ndash; I was in the middle of a line, playing Starscream dark and low, and I look up to see our fantastic and usually subdued director, Jamie Simone, our dignified producer Duane Capizzi, and ordinarily ultra-cool writers and animators lined up on the couch on the other side of the glass &ndash; with their arms flailing in the air like they&rsquo;re being attacked by dance ants. They were attempting to silently signal to me to step up Starscream&rsquo;s flamboyancy level without ruining the take. Needless to say, I didn&rsquo;t have a clue what they were trying to communicate. They ended up having to stop me and verbally give me the direction. I almost pooped myself laughing. Had I known, I would have blown it on purpose just to watch them all dance some more.

AS: Often voice actors will use a word or a catch phrase to get into the characters they play, do you have anything similar for Starscream or any of the other roles you play?

SB: (laughs) Like I said, I ain&rsquo;t no method actor, so consciously, I suppose no. If I had to put it into words though, for someone like Wolverine, it&rsquo;d be &ldquo;Back off Bub!...Rauuughhh!&rdquo;

For Starscream&hellip; I guess I&rsquo;d go back to the wonderful Welker-ism of simply using the word &ldquo;Naughtycon&rdquo; as my silent mantra&ndash; or perhaps repeating the phrase &ldquo;Its LORD Starscream!!! AAAuughhh!!&rdquo; loudly in my head.

Wow, I yell a lot, don&rsquo;t I? Maybe I should seek&hellip; aw what the hell, it works.