

Conversation with Hollywood Director Ron Howard



“STAR GAZING”

A Statement about My Autographed Portraits of Celebrities

By John Tibbetts

Over more than thirty years of broadcasting and teaching, I’ve had the good fortune to meet and interview—and draw—literally hundreds of celebrities, including movie stars, opera singers, concert pianists, authors, cartoonists, and statesmen.

Sometimes I found them backstage before a concert, or in Hollywood promoting a motion picture, or in the workplace, or just at home, etc. I found Chevy Chase at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, opera star Luciano Pavarotti in the backseat of a limousine, George Burns in a Las Vegas casino, artist Maurice Sendak painting scenery backstage at the Lyric Opera, Frank Bank (“Lumpy” on Leave It to Beaver) in a stock broker’s office . . . And frequently I seized the opportunity to paint their portraits, sometimes as sketches drawn on the spot, other times as likenesses prepared beforehand.

with Author Ray Bradbury

This hobby—or whatever it is—started long ago in 1966 when author Ray Bradbury returned a drawing I had done of him inscribed with greetings from the characters in his stories. Not only did that launch a friendship I cherish to this day (Ray is in his mid-80s now), but I was inspired to capture more likenesses and inscriptions.



And so it has gone all this time. Once inscribed and signed, these drawings remain for me mementoes of those special occasions, each one a repository of special memories. I am happy to share them with you. I hope in their own way the images and the inscriptions can help bring them almost as close to you as they were to me. . .



with Meryl Streep

So many memories. . . and unexpected incidents. . . Like the time Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon sang their “Beach Party” song for me . . . when Mel Gibson took a red clown nose out of his pocket and wore it during the rest of the interview (without betraying any sign that anything unusual had happened). . . when Debra Winger munched on the potted plant beside us as she talked. . . when Cher obligingly removed her dress shirt to reveal a tee-shirt underneath inscribed with the following words: “Attack of the Elvis Zombies”. . . when Steven Spielberg played “patty-cake” with me at the close of our interview (and I have the video tape to prove it!) . . . when Chevy Chase took a pratfall as he greeted me, bruising his knee so bad he had to cut short our conversation. . . when Brian Dennehy chose his last moments on camera to advise his young co-star, Tyrone Power, Jr., to “use a little less lip gloss, kid”. . . when singer-dancer Cyd Charisse gave me a gruesome account of what dancing in spiked heels has done to her feet. . . when Opera star Luciano Pavarotti and I stuffed ourselves into the backseat of a limousine at an airport for our interview (the best recording studio I’ve ever had, as it turned out!). . . when Clarence “Ducky” Nash (the voice of Donald Duck) broke

up a restaurant crowd with one of Donald's squawking tantrums. . . when a conversation with Muppeteer Jim Henson unexpectedly turned into an interview with Kermit (courtesy of Jim's gesturing hand). . . and when Dustin Hoffman took the opportunity at the end of our talk to issue an appeal to hear from a former girl friend of his, last seen in Cameron, Missouri (Jeanie Munson, where are you. . . ?).



Arnold Schwarzenegger



Cher



Dustin Hoffman

And I'll never forget my many interviews with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Christopher Reeve. Even years ago during his "Conan the Barbarian" days Arnold's consummate professionalism and his love of publicity marked him as a politician. And Chris, well, Chris was Chris and he preferred talking about glider flying and piano playing (he was a wonderful pianist, you know) to talking about movies. My favorite moment with Chris was at the Smithsonian Institute at the time of the installation of the "Fiftieth Anniversary of Superman," as he and his "Lois Lane" (Margot Kidder) viewed in rapt amazement the many costumes and memorabilia of the Man of Steel on display.

Sometimes our favorite celebrities dress up, and sometimes they dress down, as when Tony Bennett invited me in to his dressing room during costume changes, conversing with me while in the buff. Similarly Vladimir Ashkenazy, one of the world's greatest concert pianists, granted me a post-concert interview in his dressing room, clad only in a towel while his wife gave him a rub down.



Tom Hanks



Whoopi Goldberg

The old adage that the bigger they are the nicer they are certainly holds true. Tops on my list of nice guys and gals are Michael Caine, Meryl Streep, Morgan Freeman, Danny DeVito, Michael Douglas, Sigourney Weaver, and DeForest Kelly (“Bones” on Star Trek). The losers. . . well, discretion bids me hold my tongue, but can you spell T-0-M-M-Y L-E-E J-O-N-E-S?

Preparing my portraits has had its advantages, sometimes triggering unexpected conversations with the stars. Veteran Disney animator Ollie Johnston was moved to draw a “Mickey Mouse” just for me. Cartoon guru Chuck Jones decided I needed a drawing of Daffy Duck as the “Scarlet Pumpernickle,” Gene Hackman showed me some of the sketches he makes between takes on the movie set, and Julie Andrews and Whoopi Goldberg confessed what they really want to do is write children’s books.



Morgan Freeman



Steven Spielberg

And, maybe strangest of all, Broadway superstar Mary Martin told me that she paints portraits too! But not the conventional views of faces; no, she’s talking about drawing the backs of their heads. “You see,” she explained, “when I was on stage during the run of The Sound of Music, I got to know the Von Trapp kids by the backs of their heads during the “do-re-mi” song. So I gave them each a drawing of the backs of their heads. And since then, I’ve given all my friends portraits of the backs of their heads. It’s become my trademark!”

How revealing. While you and I look at the stage and screen at our favorite celebrities, they are looking out at us from a unique position from the back of the stage. It’s all a matter of your point of view. . . .

John C. Tibbetts