

*In my experience, it's always cold in the vendor's room of the Rio at Star Trek Las Vegas, so as I approach Andy's table, I'm unsurprised to see that he is wearing a long-sleeved shirt in the dead of summer. The dusky blue color of the fabric makes his fair eyes sparkle, and he looks boyish to me, despite his age. Fans, some timid, some experienced in convention etiquette, come and go, stopping to speak excitedly to Andy while I set up my equipment. It's late in the day at this point, and while Andy has been working since early this morning, he still greets each fan with a genuine smile and a gracious demeanor. I wait for a lull in the flow of adoring fans before beginning.*

Veau Chevalier: So, we're here with Andy Robinson. Andy, thanks for meeting with us today.

Andy Robinson: My pleasure.

VC: Having a good convention so far?

AR: Yeah. I actually do love doing these things because, you know, people are so interesting and their stories are often fascinating to me. And I'm a bit of a geek myself, so, you know, I enjoy hanging out with geeks.

VC: It's a lot of work though, I imagine.

AR: It is. I'm exhausted. By the end of the day...

VC: I know, because I'm just walking around and *I'm* exhausted by the end of the day, so you must really be tired. But you get something out of it.

AR: I do. I mean, as well as I make some money.

*(He gives a good natured laugh, showing that beatific smile that is so often associated with our "plain, simple" tailor. He continues: )*

AR: But, as I've said before, these conventions are the first time in my life that I've meet the people who've supported me all through the years.

VC: It must be very rewarding. Of course, we want to ask you about Garak and Deep Space Nine, but some of your other work as well.

AR: Ask away.

VC: So, you are a classically trained actor; you went to LAMDA.

AR: LAMDA, yeah. London Academy of Musical and Dramatic Art, yeah.

VC: And do you feel like that classical training really prepared you for doing something as esoteric as Star Trek?

AR: Oh, without the training, it would have been really very difficult to do a character like Garak. And, because of the make-up and the prosthetics, it's...

*(He pauses, considering.)*

With a classical training, you learn how to use your energy. And there are... I've seen young actors who came on the show [Deep Space Nine] who didn't have that kind of training and they couldn't get past the mask. I mean, I'm talking about young actors who had to wear prosthetics.

VC: And had you done a lot of mask work prior to that?

AR: A bit. A bit. But... When you watch the other actors, like, you know, René [Auberjonois] or Armin [Shirmerman] or Avery [Brooks], these are people who are classically trained and who can project the energy beyond [the make-up]... Well, Avery wasn't in prosthetics, but certainly Armin and René were.

*[Our conversation is interrupted as another fan approaches the table, and I sit back, watching the way Andy seems to take a real interest in each person he speaks with – it seems effortless and sincere, and I feel my admiration for the man grow as he engages in good-natured chatting with the nervous looking young man across from him. I find myself smiling as he thanks Andy and walks away, a little spring in his step.]*

VC: So we wanted to talk about the documentary [What We Left Behind] a little bit because you were pretty involved with that – at least in the film presentation part.

AR: Oh, I was, I was involved. I mean, you know, I kept on coming back and doing more stuff and whatever. I had such a good time working with Ira [Steven Behr] and them.

VC: One of the things I noticed was that there was a segment in it where Ira was talking about Garak being gay and possibly, you know, they missed an opportunity with him to 'come out' in the Wire.

AR: That's right.

VC: Now, as a bisexual woman, I – and I'm sure others – always perceived Garak as being more bisexual or pansexual. I was just wondering what your take on that was.

AR: My take was *always* pansexual. Because, you know, you're trying to work out "Okay, an alien, what's an alien? A Cardassian?" We have to start with the human image and they're all kind of hominoid, the aliens. But, you know... Do they have the same habits that we do? Are they the same, you know, in taste and in their sexuality? And from the very first moment I did the show, when I saw Dr. Bashir, I see him across a crowded room and I'm sexually attracted to him. And I thought, well, that was the *in* for me in terms of Garak and his sexuality.

VC: So you definitely find Garak to be... more sexually fluid.

AR: I like that. Sexually fluid. That's very good.

*[He looks off in the distance.]*

AR: That's the one thing that they never got right. That wasn't Garak. It, you know, I think that's part of what Ira was talking about – that missed opportunity. Because you could have had a really wonderful kind of relationship, a *gay* relationship, you know? Or, you know, with a character that really was so different from a Cardassian, another species.

VC: And not just physically different, but ideologically very different.

AR: Absolutely, yeah.

VC: And is that your best memory of working on Deep Space Nine, working with [Alexander] Siddig?

AR: Oh yeah. I love him. I mean, as a person; I really am very close to him. So, it's certainly one of the good memories. I mean, the whole thing, doing Garak, honestly, for seven years was a joy. It really was. And it's one of the highlights of my life, and God knows I'm so glad... Because I didn't want to go to the initial audition, you know? And it's because I'd gone a few times to read for Odo and test for that... And I'm glad René got the role because René is brilliant... But I thought, well, and they wanted me to come back and read for this guy, Garak, and I thought "Jesus, you've seen me all these times and I don't want to go." And it was Irene [his wife] who convinced me to go.

VC: And we all say a prayer of thanks every day to Irene for blessing us with that.

*[We share a laugh. His eyes seem to light up at the mention of his wife. "She is my life," he tells me with a smile.]*

VC: So, that brings me to your book. You've written two books: *A Stitch in Time*, which is essentially Garak's memoir, and then you've written your own memoir, *Stepping Into the Light*. A lot of people who have read both have commented on some parallels.

AR: Yes.

VC: And was that intentional or what that something that wasn't planned?

AR: Well, no, I think that... Because when I wrote the Garak thing, I wrote it because... The genesis of the writing was I was trying to create a back-story, a history for Garak. And so I tried to stay close to *my* history. One of the first rules of writing is write about what you know. And so Garak's early childhood is very much like mine. It's... obviously it's different. I didn't go to a place called Bamarren. I didn't come from Cardassia. I'm not a Cardassian. But still, the school and the experiences, the emotional experience was very similar.

VC: It was really interesting. Because obviously I read *A Stitch in Time* first, you know it came out first, so as I was reading *Stepping Into the Light*, I was going “Ah” and then when I talked to other people who had read it, they’re like “Oh, I noticed that too!” So, it’s interesting to just kind of see where some of Garak’s story came from... Because that was the thing with *Deep Space Nine*; all the characters were so internally driven.

AR: That’s right.

VC: So, to see that reflected was really interesting to me.

AR: That’s well put, and they were. And somebody mentions that, you know, they... Just today, I thought it was a really perceptive comment, that the character development in *Deep Space Nine* was often tripped by the fact that they were on a station, you know, rather than going from one place to the next to the next. So it wasn’t so plot driven as it was character driven.

VC: No, it really is. You know, when you have a limited atmosphere, you kind of have to do those things, but it’s great to be able to explore that, I think. But having read both of your books, you are very much a gifted story-teller, not just in terms of what you do on screen, but, you know, pen to paper. Do you have plans to do any more writing?

AR: Yes, I do. I do. And I’m actually right in the middle of figuring that out. And I think that at this point – I’m saying this for the first time, so, see what it’s worth – but I think I’m just going to pick it up. I’m going to pick it up from where I left off, but also back track as well. Because there are things I realized I wanted to talk about that I didn’t talk about, you know, in *Stepping Into the Light*.

VC: I noticed a couple of times that you would start to say something and then not follow up on it, and the psychologist in me is like, “Oh, he obviously wants to talk about that,” but then, you know, something’s keeping him from doing it.

AR: That’s good. That’s... Yes.

*[Another fan comes up, and even invites Andy to a party that evening. In other circumstances, the invitation might sound unsettling to an actor being approached by a fan. Perhaps it is Andy’s own peaceful energy that puts everyone at ease; the question sounds casual and friendly. After the exchange, I watch him walk away with a smile, an autograph, and undoubtedly a good story to tell his friends. Andy turns his attention back to me.]*

AR: Okay.

VC: That must be so nice.

AR: It is nice!

VC: Especially since *Deep Space Nine* didn’t get that kind of recognition when it was on the air.

AR: It did not. As a matter of fact, sometimes we would be on at midnight or one o'clock in the morning; there were times where they would skip episodes. I mean, we really were the step-child of the franchise.

VC: Honestly, I didn't watch it when it was on the air. I grew up watching Next Gen [Star Trek: the Next Generation].

AR: Yeah?

VC: And Deep Space Nine came on and I watched the first few episodes and I was like, "I don't like this. I don't – I don't get it." And then I didn't watch it for years and years until like ten years ago, I finally sat down and was like, "Okay." And, you know, you can binge watch it now, which is how it's meant to be seen.

AR: Well, exactly. Because of the arch of the story-telling. Yeah.

VC: But some of the work you've done, not on Deep Space Nine, one that really resonated with me was A Question of Loyalty, the short film you did a few years ago with the man being interrogated, set in Nazi Germany.

AR: Oh my God. Oh my God. Wow. You saw that?

VC: I've seen almost all of your work.

AR: Holy cow.

VC: So, I really love that piece.

AR: It was a lovely piece.

VC: It's a beautiful piece of work, and I was just thinking the other day, with the current political climate, if it would even be made today.

AR: You know, now that you mention it, I'm going to talk to the guy who wrote and directed it, Randy Wilkins, and find out and ask him exactly that question. Yeah.

VC: It's powerful.

AR: It is.

VC: And, I mean, it's disturbing. But it's such a powerful piece. How did you get onboard with that?

AR: Well, because I did another film with him, a longer film. God, what was it called? It was about the making, about the making of a Western, I can't remember what it was. But I worked with him before and we had a great time. And he asked me to come back and do that.

VC: You've done obviously lots and lots of things outside of Star Trek. Is there a role that you've always wanted to play, but haven't had the opportunity?

AR: Well, you know, not really. I'm doing... I've actually been knocking off some roles lately, but theatre, like, I'm doing Prospero in the Tempest, doing Oberon in Midsummer Night's Dream.

*[I am beyond excited at the prospect of Andy performing Oberon. The exclamation of joyous incredulity escapes my mouth before I can catch it.]*

VC: Oh, you're not, are you?!

AR: I did. I did it last year, which was... And I also did a Julius Caesar, you know, but it was...

VC: Your first musical.

AR: That's right! But it was actually called Julius Weezer. But it was wonderful. I had such a great time. So, I mean, it's that kind of stuff that I love doing.

VC: So the musical went well?

AR: Oh, great.

VC: How long did it run?

AR: Only ran a month. Sadly.

VC: It was your first musical, so did you do a lot of special training for it?

AR: No, just rehearsal. And, you know, I tried to keep up with the choreography and then invented a lot of my own.

VC: I mean, Weezer's not exactly easy music to sing, some of it.

AR: No, it isn't. It isn't.

VC: I mean, it's rock, but people underestimate it a lot.

*[And now it is Andy's turn to stop the interview. He asks about my life and my job and my family, and as with his other fans, his interest in my life and what I have to say sounds incredibly sincere. I'm touched by his queries and ask about his family in turn.]*

VC: You've got a little grandson now, right?

AR: Yes, little Willy Cosmo.

*[He brightens in a way I hadn't seen before, sitting a little straighter, his gestures becoming ever so slightly more expressive.]*

AR: He loves everything. This is the great thing about this guy: he is so enthusiastic about life. Everything's an adventure. Everything. And it's sort of like, in a sense, it's revived Irene and I. It's so exciting.

VC: It's great when they're that size, and you know, you blink and you miss it. So, becoming a grandfather, has that changed the way you approach your work?

AR: You know, in a sense, yes. I'm not, you know, I was as good a father as I could be... But you realize, when you have grandchildren, you realize, wow, it's so much easier to be... easier. You know? Just like, when you're a parent, you're worried about the bills and bringing them up and making sure that they're okay and all of that stuff. And with a grandchild, it's just unconditional. I love you, I love you for... and then at the end of the day, you go home to your parents and I don't have to deal with... you know. But you do learn something about unconditional love.

VC: I can only try and fathom what that relationship must be like and the way it must... I mean, it must change the way... Because what you do, as an actor, as an artist, everything you do is informed by who you are and your life experiences, even if you're not a method actor. So, you know, having a child and having a grandchild has got to impact that.

AR: Yeah, it has.

VC: What is your work that you're most proud of?

AR: My stage work, both directing and as an actor. A lot of, you know, obviously not all of it... But most of it. That, I think, is still the craft. That's still the mountain to climb. When I did Prospero recently, I was very proud of that. But I'm proud of the Garak character, and the arch of that character, and how that character grew and progressed and deepened. And, of course, having the luxury of seven years, which is really... Because everything percolates. Over the years, it just gets more and more into yourselves. But, but I'm looking at these pictures on this table here –

*[He sweeps his hand, indicating the stacks of glossy 8x10s from so many of his film and television credits.]*

AR: You know, and there's Dirty Harry and Hellraiser and stuff like that, and I think "Wow, I've been very fortunate," you know, to have had a number of characters... You know, and then there are characters that are a one-off, like when I played John Kennedy on Twilight Zone or when I, in that old series Kojak... There was an episode on Kojak that I did with Ruth Gordon, who was, you know, one of my... She was like an idol, and that episode was extraordinary. So there are things like that along the way, like stepping stones that I'm very grateful and proud of.

VC: And especially because something like Garak, you have such a wider audience. You know, when you do a film, it reaches so many more people than stage, which is not to diminish stage work...

AR: No, no.

VC: Because it's very important, but in our culture, we don't have a lot of access to it.

AR: One episode of DS9 was seen by more people than all my stage work combined.

VC: That's crazy.

AR: And most of my stage work happened in small theatres.

VC: What was the one you mention in Stepping Into the Light... Subject to Fits?

AR: That's how I got Dirty Harry. Because Clint Eastwood came to that. But that was an amazing show, and a wonderful character.

VC: It really sounded like it.

AR: Yeah.

VC: So, you've dedicated your life to art. What do art and culture mean to you, and why are they so important for us as a society?

AR: Art... I mean, it's how I've learned how to heal. And it's how I've learned how to forgive. It's how I got in touch with my imagination. It's how I now at my advanced age understand that I am a co-creator of my life. And it is the art that I've engaged in and that has engaged me, that has taught me that all of us, not just the artists... Because in a sense we're all artists as human beings... And by which I mean very specifically we all are co-creators of our life. We imagine our life, even when things are hard... and especially when things are hard because that's when we must rely on our imaginative power, our capacity to imagine our lives and that we move forward because we're always moving forward. So, and this is also what I learned when I was teaching, I mean that because you bring what you know and what you've learned to your teaching. And so that's... that's what I brought.

*That's what he brought indeed. And that's what he has shared with all of us for nearly fifty years. I mourn the fact that so many of us will never be able to see him perform live on stage; theatre is such a visceral experience and one that I'm sure would enliven every audience member to see such a talent in full force. But I will always be grateful to whatever forces (and Irene) that led to Andy being cast in so many dynamic television and film roles, characters that touched our hearts, performances that sparked something inside of us. I thank him and we hug; I hope he understands that my gratitude is not just for this brief interview, but for sharing his many gifts with us all.*