

Shatner Down to Earth on New Talk Show

Shatner Probes Fellow Celebs in His Quirky Style; From 'Star Trek', 'Boston Legal' to A&E's 'Raw Nerve' Talk Show Host

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William Shatner isn't quite sure what makes celebrities like Kelsey Grammer, Valerie Bertinelli and comedian Jimmy Kimmel spill their guts to him on his new talk show, A&E's "Raw Nerve."



William Shatner Chats Up Jimmy Kimmel

Perhaps it's his restrained panache?
Or his own tabloid-traversed past?

"I don't want to back anybody into a corner, but if I probe gently enough so that I don't get too vivid a reaction, I get what I'm looking for," said the icon known to generations of TV fans as "Star Trek's" Captain Kirk, hard-edged cop "T.J. Hooker," "Boston Legal" curmudgeon Denny Crane, as well as from his long-running Priceline gig. "I suppose it's almost like a doctor trying to find a place where he can. He probes a little, if there's not too much pain, he probes a little further."

And much to his viewers' delight, Shatner's strangely understated style

has yielded many telling gems from his guests. Bertinelli revealed that she thinks she's going to hell, but that she can live with it. Shatner, as father-figure, said he would absolve her if he could. Grammer told Shatner that his ex-wife once shot at him – yes, with a gun. Tim Allen talked about going to prison for three years, just before his comedy career took off. Such unexpected celebrity candor has made the show a critics' darling.

But, Shatner confessed to ABCNews.com in his signature deadpan manner, "What I'm doing has no technique in it whatsoever. It's just me trying to make a conversation. No, you can get it on the corner of Laurel and Ventura in L.A. It's just a conversation, that's what I've been doing my whole life."

Ask Shatner, 77, why A&E chose him to man the hot seat on "Raw Nerve," and he doesn't quite have an answer.

"A&E got a hold of me and asked would I like to do a talk show? I thought about it and I kept saying to myself, 'What do we need another talk show for?'" he said, laughing. "Then the title occurred to me, as well as the slant of it. When I thought of 'Raw Nerve,' I thought, 'That would be interesting to me, to see if I could touch a raw nerve in somebody.'"

Shatner's Show Surprises Critics

Hitting that nerve that provokes his guests to open up has created another unexpected consequence -- warm reviews



William Shatner, star of the original "Star Trek" series, helms his own show, "Raw Nerve."
(Getty Images/AP Photo)

"What's surprising is how serious this show is, and how grounded is its host," Newsday critic Verne Gay wrote in a review of the show. "It's all very disarming and even charming, and maybe [Jimmy] Kimmel is thinking, 'Jeez, Captain Kirk is asking me about my sex life.' But it works. He gets sober, interesting stuff out of his subjects, and they seem to be enjoying the exercise in Shat's non sequitur style."

The Hollywood Reporter's Barry Garron wrote: "You might not think of Shatner as a talk show interviewer but, in his own way, he is surprisingly effective at getting his celebrity subjects to reveal aspects of their lives that are fresh and surprising."

No one was more surprised than Shatner himself.

"We've had an enormously successful reaction," he said. "When you think something's great, usually others will point out it isn't. So when you think something's great and others agree, that's hugely satisfying."

Shatner says A&E has OK'ed another 13 episodes of the show, with production beginning in the next few weeks.

And although "Boston Legal" -- for which Shatner has won two Emmys -- wrapped up its four-season run last month, he's not about to slow down. "I'm having so much fun on 'Raw Nerve,'" he said. "Can't you just see the fun? But I have a lot on my plate."

Besides a second season of "Raw Nerve" -- and his 11th year as the Priceline spokesman -- he'll be gearing for a feature film he wrote called "The Shiva Club," which, he said, "is about the relationship between laughter and grief. I will be producing and directing this one. But I will try to avoid starring in it."

He's also set to release a documentary called "Gonzo Ballet," about the making of a ballet based on six songs Shatner wrote for an album with Ben Folds.

Shatner released a memoir, "Up Till Now," last year and is working on turning his "TekWar" novel series into a set of graphic novels.

Still, he's not too busy, he noted, should the director of a certain remake want to talk.

"Good for them, bringing it to a new generation," he said of the upcoming "Star Trek" remake, directed by "Lost" creator J.J. Abrams. "I don't think I will be involved. But I would love to play the lead in it. And I talk to J.J. all the time, but it's over the net, so you talk to him for me, OK? Tell him to call. Tell him Shatner says, 'J.J., call me.'"