

Saldana Does Star Trek: Beam Me Aboard, Zoe!

Written by Kam Williams



Given Zoë Saldaña's meteoric rise, it only makes sense that the flick that finally rockets her to the heights of superstardom would be an intergalactic adventure like *Star Trek*

Previously, you might have seen this striking ballet dancer-turned-actress as the late Bernie Mac's daughter who was dating Ashton Kutcher in

Guess Who

, playing second-banana to Britney Spears in *Crossroads*

, as the love interest of Nick Cannon in *Drumline*

, opposite Johnny Depp in *Pirates of the Caribbean*

, with Forest Whitaker and Dennis Quaid in *Vantage Point*

, or directed by Steven Spielberg in *The Terminal*

alongside Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

Last year, the photogenic fashion plate made *People Magazine's* 100 Most Beautiful People in the World list (see [http://www.](http://www.people.com/people/package/gallery/0,,20193583_20196426_15,00.html)

[people.com/people/package/gallery/0,,20193583_20196426_15,00.html](http://www.people.com/people/package/gallery/0,,20193583_20196426_15,00.html)) and she was also name #42 on Maxim Magazine's Hot 100 list for 2008.

Here, she reflects on portraying Lt. Nyota Uhura in *Star Trek*, a role originated on TV by Nichelle Nichols in 1966.

ZS: Hi Kam.

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KW: Thanks so much for another interview, Zoe.

ZS: Of course, of course.

KW: The last time we spoke was a year ago, and we only touched on *Star Trek* slightly back then. Let me ask you this. Was it at all intimidating becoming a part of a film franchise that fans take so seriously and even attend conventions for?

ZS: I would be lying to you if I said I didn't have any concerns about it. I did ask myself, "Do I really want to take on that kind of pressure?" and take the risk of not being well received by the fans or of becoming typecast so early in my career. But in talking with J.J. [director J.J. Abrams], I became curious about the fact that he had been more of a *Star Wars* than a *Star Trek* fan. And what convinced me was that he had just such a beautiful vision for the film. I figured if he was taken with these characters, I definitely didn't want to be left out.

KW: How familiar were you with *Star Trek* prior to taking on the role?

ZS: I never really watched the TV series. And after J.J. offered me the part, I wanted to see it even less, because I was so afraid of falling victim to what we sometimes do as actors, which is to imitate. I felt that Nichelle Nichols did not deserve that, and neither did my character. Plus, because I would be playing a much younger Uhura who's not quite on the [Spaceship] Enterprise yet, it gave me an opportunity to innovate. So, she's not comfortable in her own skin... she's finding it really hard... she's very studious... These were the sort of things I focused on, and I only hope that the fans receive it well.

KW: How has Nichelle Nichols received it?

ZS: She was very happy, when she I met her on the set. She was pleased that J.J. was the one revamping the *Star Trek* franchise, and that I was playing Uhura.

KW: How did that make you feel?

ZS: That humbled me in such a way that I can't even describe.

KW: Did she offer any pointers about playing Uhura?

ZS: Her advice was just to run with it, to follow my gut, and that whatever I was going to do for Uhura, to do it well.

KW: Lt. Uhura is a linguist. Are you good with languages?

ZS: I speak two languages, and I would like to learn more.

KW: How was it working with the rest of the cast on the set?

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ZS: It was very enjoyable because the atmosphere was so light and we all became great friends. The chemistry that transpired was very, very natural and genuine. That made me so happy because it's not often that you get to go to work with people you want to see every day and who you have so much fun creating with.

KW: The buzz on this film has certainly been very positive. Everybody who's seen it is saying the franchise has been totally revitalized.

ZS: Gosh, that makes me feel so good. If it could make a believer out of me, trust me, it can make a believer out of anyone. I hadn't been familiar with the series, although I did know about that one dude with the pointy ears.

KW: Spock.

ZS: Yeah, I knew who Leonard Nimoy was, and that he embodied what *Star Trek* meant to all the fans. But it wasn't until I started doing my research for this movie, and started going to fan sites, that I began to fall in love with these characters.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

ZS: None that come up right now, but I wish you would give me a day to think about it and get back to me.

KW: Okay, the Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

ZS: I always strive to keep a balance with my fears. I don't like to be ruled by them. At the same time, I don't like the idea of living my life totally free of any fears. I like having that moderation.

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good belly laugh?

ZS: Earlier this week.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

ZS: I've been reading *The Catcher in the Rye*. It's the kind of book I get a little concerned about being seen reading in public. So, I only read it when I'm at home. But the last book that I fully read was *Veronika Decides to Die* by Paulo Coehlo.

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What music are you listening to nowadays?

ZS: Right now, I'm listening to Pink.

KW: What has been the biggest obstacle you have had to overcome?

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ZS: The biggest obstacle I've had to overcome is being a woman in a man's world.

KW: The Rudy Lewis question: Who's at the top of your hero list?

ZS: I'd say my niece.

KW: How did it feel to be named to *People Magazine's* 100 Most Beautiful People in the World list last year?

ZS: [Giggles] I felt a combination of happiness and humility. At the same time there's a lot of pressure, because people can approach you whose intentions aren't in the best place, and they can say things that are very hurtful. And on one of those days when you wake up and you just go and get your coffee without worrying about looking your best, you make yourself vulnerable to someone who'd say something like, "You look awful for being on the Top 100 list." The pressure that that entails as a consequence, in having to defend leading a normal, everyday life is a bit of a cancer sore, but I do still feel grateful because I'd rather be considered pretty than average.

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

ZS: I see Zoe.

KW: How do you feel about Obama's becoming President?

ZS: So happy! It was so appropriate, and it let me know that sometimes we have to be patient because the one thing that is inevitable in life is evolution. Whether it comes at the pace that we are expecting it or not, it's inevitable.

KW: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

ZS: To work and to love working, because I find it really frustrating when people go, "I want to be famous and glamorous like you." It's hard for me not to have a bad thought when someone says that to me, since if there's anything this business is not, is glamorous. It's only glamorous for maybe five minutes every now and then. Mostly, it's very arduous work which calls for serious commitment and passion. Plus, half the time you will not get paid what you feel you deserve, if anything at all. So, you have to be very committed and find happiness in the work that you do.

KW: What's on the horizon for you?

ZS: I cannot wait for you to get a glimpse of *Avatar*.

KW: Directed by James Cameron

ZS: I am so proud of all the work that he's done with the film over the past 10 years. And the cast has put in 2½ years of our love, dedication and sweat into the project. To finally get the

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opportunity to share it with you all is going to be the best perk. I'm actually sort of tired now. I get really sleepy around this time, because the work has been done with *Star Trek* when it comes to the interviews and publicity. Now, I can honestly go to bed, wait for the premiere and only pray that the film is going to be well received by the audience. And in a couple of months, I'm going to have to do it again for

Avatar

. It's necessary, and it's so beautiful, and when it works, it's so rewarding.

KW: Well, thanks again, Zoe. It looks like a real breakout year for you between *Star Trek* and *Avatar*

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ZS: Thank you. Have a good day. Bye.

To see a trailer for *Star Trek*, visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScHxUopDIKc>