

GENE RODDENBERRY: THE STAR TREK PHILOSOPHY

"I think probably the most often asked question about the show is: 'Why the Star Trek Phenomenon?' And it could be an important question because you can ask: 'How can a simple space opera with blinking lights and zap-guns and a goblin with pointy ears reach out and touch the hearts and minds of literally millions of people and become a cult in some cases?' Obviously, what this means is, that television has incredible power. They're saying that if Star Trek can do this, then perhaps another carefully calculated show could move people in other directions – as to keep selfish interest to creating other cults for selfish purposes – industrial cartels, political parties, governments. Ultimate power in this world, as you know, has always been one simple thing: the control and manipulation of minds. Fortunately, in the attempt however to manipulate people through any – so called Star Trek Formula – is doomed to failure, and I'll tell you why in just a moment. First of all, our show did not reach and affect all these people because it was deep and great literature. Star Trek was not Ibsen or Shakespeare. To get a prime time show – network show – on the air and to keep it there, you must attract and hold a minimum of 18 million people every week. You have to do that in order to move people away from Gomer Pyle, Bonanza, Beverly Hill Billies and so on. And we tried to do this with entertainment, action, adventure, conflict and so on.

But once we got on the air, and within the limits of those accident ratio limits, we did not accept the myth, that the television audience has an infantile mind. We had an idea, and we had a premise, and we still believe that. As a matter of fact we decided to risk the whole show on that premise. We believed that the often ridiculed mass audience is sick of this world's petty nationalism and all it's old ways and old hatreds, and that people are not only willing but anxious to think beyond most petty beliefs that have for so long kept mankind divided. So you see that the formula, the magic ingredient that many people keep seeking and many of them keep missing is really not in Star Trek. It is in the audience. There is an intelligent life form out on the other side of that television too.

The whole show was an attempt to say that humanity will reach maturity and wisdom on the day that it begins not just to tolerate, but to take a special delight in differences in ideas and differences in life forms. We tried to say that the worst possible thing that can happen to all of us is for the future to somehow press us into a common mould, where we begin to act and talk and look and think alike. If we cannot learn to actually enjoy those small differences, take a positive delight in those small differences between our own kind, here on this planet, then we do not deserve to go out into space and meet the diversity that is almost certainly out there. And I think that this is what people responded to.

The result of that was that seven years after being dropped by the network of saying those things, there are now more people watching it than ever before. And if you ascribe those things to any mystic or scriptural brilliance in Star Trek, you miss the entire point. For Star Trek proofs, as faulty as individual episodes could be, is that the much-maligned common man and common woman has an enormous hunger for brotherhood. They are ready for the 23rd century now, and they are light-years ahead of their petty governments and their visionless leaders."