

## **A CONVERSATION ABOUT BOND, AND BEYOND, WITH DAVID HEDISON**

*Location: Beverly Hills, California / Date: June 2008*

*Interview by Anders Frejdb, Editor, From Sweden With Love*

'Felix Leiter' in LIVE AND LET DIE (1973) & LICENCE TO KILL (1989)

### **How did you become involved in LIVE AND LET DIE in the first place?**

The screenwriter, Tom Mankiewicz, was a friend, and he thought I'd be good for the part. He let me read it, I liked it and he set a meeting with the producer for me. I got the part.

### **How did you prepare for the role of Felix Leiter once they had chosen you?**

I read the book. Felix Leiter was written as a fairly straightforward character, not too far removed from the average American or from me (except for the guns and fighting part).

### **Did you read any of the Fleming novels to get the background for the character?**

Only LIVE AND LET DIE, both films I did had elements from that book.

### **How was it like filming on location in Jamaica, New York and Florida?**

I had a great time filming in New Orleans and New York City with Roger.

I also enjoyed Mexico and Key West with Timothy – fabulous locations.

Benicio Del Toro was at the hotel in Key West. He was relatively unknown then, and he struck immediately as a great guy, and a really good actor, charismatic and with a good sense of humor. We had a good time together.

### **What did you think about the relationship between Roger Moore and the rest of the crew during LALD, his first Bond film?**

Roger was always professional and ready to film. He loved cracking up the crew in between takes with jokes to keep the set light. The most remarkable thing about Roger was that he knew everyone on the crew by name and was always wonderful to them.

### **What happened at the end of filming LALD? Any end-of-shooting party or similar event? And how was the premiere and the after-premiere-party like?**

I never worked on the final day of shooting of either LIVE AND LET DIE or LICENCE TO KILL so there were no wrap parties for Felix! I don't think I went to any LIVE AND LET DIE premieres. I may have been working.

### **When did you start working on LICENCE TO KILL and for how long did your scenes take to complete?**

I started working on the film in August of 1988. I filmed first in Key West and then moved with the production to the studio in Mexico where my part in the film was completed. I worked about a month.

### **As you're one of a few actors who have worked with two actors playing James Bond, what are your personal thoughts on the differences between Roger Moore's Bond and Timothy Dalton's?**

They have different working styles, but both were extremely effective at what they do and played the part to their particular strengths. I knew Roger longer, so there was the added friendship, but Timothy was also good to work with.

### **Before this year's release of QUANTUM OF SOLACE (in which Jeffrey Wright portrays 'Felix Leiter' for the second time) you are the only actor to have portrayed him twice, how was it to play him for a second time in LTK?**

I was pleased they wanted me. It was a good part. I was happy to revisit the character and have a pivotal role in the second film.

**Could you tell us a bit about your impressions and any special memories from working with these actors and filmmakers:**

**Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman as film producers?**

Cubby was a friend. He treated everyone like family. His wife Dana was great, as were his two daughters and her son, Michael. My wife Bridget and I saw them socially quite a bit (both before and after LICENCE TO KILL). I remember a particularly fabulous New Year's Party at their house in Los Angeles – where they brought in snow. I think they were one of the first to ever do that.

I used to see Harry Saltzman at Roger Moore's house, before Roger became James Bond, but we were never close and did not socialize beyond our mutual friendship with the Moores. We do still occasionally see their daughter Hilary, who is a wonderful person.

**Guy Hamilton and John Glen as directors?**

They both knew what they wanted and I hope I gave them what they asked of me. Directing Bond is probably less about the actors and more about the overall pace and style of the film and both Hamilton and Glen were veteran directors who knew their stuff.

**Sir Roger Moore and Timothy Dalton as 'James Bond'?**

Roger was a great Bond. Timothy was very serious, he wanted to do a good job in the part and did.

**Robert Davi as villain?**

Davi was having a good time with his character. I think he enjoyed feeding me to shark more than I did. But then, he didn't have to hang from that hook! Hard to tell from his portrayal of the character, but he was a lovely, warm, caring man – I'm sure he still is.

**Priscilla Barnes as wife?**

She was excellent in the scenes we had together and was perfect for the role, I thought.

**Did you make any promotional tour for the films and in that case, where did you go and how was it like?**

In 1989, I went to the Royal Premiere of LICENCE TO KILL in London with my wife Bridget and I took my daughter, Alexandra, to the premiere in Los Angeles.

**If you could only chose one, which is your best and most special personal memory from being involved in the Bond films?**

I love the memory of having dinner with Bridget and another couple at what was then the Bistro Gardens in Beverly Hills when Cubby and Dana Broccoli stopped by our table on the way out to chat and catch up on what we were doing. The next day I got a call for a meeting to play 'Leiter' in LICENCE TO KILL. It's amazing that things like that do happen – being in the right place at the right time.

**Beyond James Bond:**

**How many films have you been involved in apart from the Bond films?**

16 feature films if you include the one that wasn't released (Reality Trap).

The rest were TV movies and series and guest star parts, over 100 at last count.

**Of all your films, is there anyone or a few that you found more difficult to work on for some reason compare to others? Is there any special anecdotes related to that which you would like to share with us?**

It was all so long ago. I did enjoy the two non-Bond films I made with Roger Moore, in particular the one about the oil rig hijack we made in Ireland in 1979. Roger played a real character in that one and was brilliant at it. I also celebrated (to say the least) my 52nd birthday there with Roger.

**Of all directors, actors and actresses that you have worked with, is there anyone special you really enjoy working with?**

This is a hard one to answer because there were so many great colleagues, but it is always wonderful to work with good friends - Juliet Mills, Roger Moore and Richard Basehart immediately come to mind.

**In what countries have you been filming and is there any film studio that you consider to be a 'second home' because of much work there?**

I have filmed all over the world; in Prague, Italy and Japan. I would have say 20th Century Fox Studios is the place I felt most at home because of all the work I did there. I always felt I was surrounded by friends and people who had known me since I was fist put under contract there.

**Of all your films, which is your personal favourite? And among all films you have seen, is there anyone that you enjoy more and can see over and over again?**

'The Fly' is my favourite but watching my films over and over is not something I'd enjoy, so I don't.

**What impact do you think LIVE AND LET DIE has had on your acting career?**

Not as much as I would have liked, but it did keep me working for another 15 years after it came out.

**Current situation and future**

**Are you doing any films or TV work at the moment?**

Now that the writer's strike is over, I hope to. We will see what I get asked to do in the late summer, when TV production resumes. I've been helping write a book about my classic film, The Fly, for the past year. The book will be released in the fall of 2008 for the fiftieth anniversary and will be available through my web site at [www.davidhedison.com](http://www.davidhedison.com)

**Tell us a little bit about yourself i.e. background, hobbies and interest, education, family, where you live now etc.**

I've wanted to be an actor from the moment I saw 'Blood and Sand' when I was 13 years old and I am grateful to have been able to spend my working life doing what I really love. I'm married to a lovely woman, my wife Bridget, for 40 years and we have two beautiful grown daughters, Alexandra, a photographer who sometimes acts, and Serena, who has a Masters Degree in Journalism and is currently working for the Food Network in new York City. I've been in Hollywood for fifty years and am proud of the career I had as a stage, movie and television actor. I love attending sessions at the Actors Studio both in Los Angeles and in New York City, when I'm there and seeing the new young talent. I celebrated my 81st birthday recently and I plan to continue working for as long as I am able to and for as long as I am wanted.

**Finally, on a personal note:**

**Have you ever been filming and/or privately visiting Sweden or/and any other of the Scandinavian countries?**

Unfortunately, I have never been there, but hope one day to visit.

**What do you think about this website - From Sweden With Love?**

First rate!

DAVID, MANY THANKS FOR THIS WONDERFUL INTERVIEW!