



The Man and the Myth

Streaming now on Netflix, *The Christmas Chronicles* stars Kurt Russell as Santa Claus, a role he says is one of his all-time favorites.

BY TOMMIE ETHINGTON

Q: Why did you want the role of Santa Claus?

A: There's this mystery to him, but everyone knows who he is. I've had the chance to create some memorable characters—from Snake Plissken to Wyatt Earp—but Santa is, for me, in the top three.

What's fun about *The Christmas Chronicles*

(<https://www.netflix.com/title/80199682>) is we're giving you history and some reality. In the film, Santa's a very real person, and it's hard for him to understand why people don't believe, even when he's standing right there in front of them.

What role does Santa play in your own family traditions?

Christmas and Santa have always been a huge thing in my family. Our dad was Santa—when the holidays rolled around, he'd pretend he had to get heavy and eat more [laughs]. The other thing with Santa was that you had to be asleep when he arrived. If there was any indication of Santa being near and you weren't in bed, it wasn't looking good for you. It was game over. You better get to bed now and get to sleep quickly. I remember as a kid hearing bells and knowing that finally—after waiting all year—he was coming.

Was there an item at the top of your Christmas wish list, growing up?

First of all, in our family, there's gifts you might get from Santa that are near the stockings, and then there's gifts that we give to each other—so there's a separation there. For me, it was a set of drums when I was 15 years old, but that came from my parents. It wasn't a Santa present.

What kinds of presents did Santa bring, then?

Santa things are more connected to the stockings in our family. It's maybe not the big present that you've been wanting. You had to be very clever in our house—if you hinted too much about what you wanted, you blew it. You weren't going to get it. You had to hint very indirectly, so that the other person thought they were the one getting an idea for what you might want.

Did you ever learn to play the drums?

Yeah, I did, when I was young. It was the Christmas present I remember most because it was something I really desperately wanted. I remember thinking that if I could just get this Pearl drum kit, I would never want for anything else. And it really was true. After that Christmas, whatever came about, whatever I got, I was happy.

Switching gears, you've done a lot of your own stunts. Why's that important to you?

I've done lots of them, but I don't anymore. I always worked with my stunt guys and the stunt coordinators to make sure that we could do it safely and always had an out. You had to be able to escape it. And there were a few times in my life where I got injured and that happened later on. I think I was on the set of *Soldier* and realized I was now 47 years old and getting injured. I realized it was me, so I've pretty much slowed down. I've done stuff that I wouldn't call stunts—fight scenes, jumping out of windows—but I did it because I could. I didn't do it because I wanted to prove anything to myself. I just wanted to make a better movie.

Of all of the things you've accomplished in your career, what are you most proud of?

I suppose I'm proudest of the characters who I've had the opportunity to create. I've noticed that in the last seven or eight years, there are tons of these action figures—real artful renderings of characters that I've played—and somebody once pointed out to me that I had more than almost anybody else. They're not Marvel characters, except for Ego. The rest of them are people that I

created. All of the things I did with John [Carpenter] and Quentin [Tarantino], they're characters who someone thought enough of to make something. I suppose that tells me they had a great time with them and found them memorable. That's what's always made me want to do movies.

If you could star alongside any other actor, living or dead, who would it be and why?

The only actor who was ever a fascination to me, in terms of what she or he presented, was Marlon Brando. Never worked with him, never met him, but I liked what I saw and what he was doing. From an early age, I watched *Mutiny on the Bounty* and thought, *That guy is really, just by nature, interesting*. I liked the things he did throughout the years and found him to be the greatest actor, if there is such a thing. I suppose it would have been fun to play in the sandbox with him because he looked like he was having a ball immersed in playing someone, and that's an attractive thing to me.

For this hypothetical film, what genre would you choose?

Any genre. I don't think [Marlon Brando] had any limitations that way. And I think part of my career has been to play many different characters in many different genres, too. I think what counts is who you are playing. It doesn't matter what environment you're in—you're the one who's going to make it believable. The genre is going to be made believable by how you do your characters. That's your challenge.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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