

Where no man has gone before

To Be Takei

Screening May 18 at 7:00pm
McMenamins Kennedy School
5736 N.E. 33rd Avenue, Portland

By Marie Lo

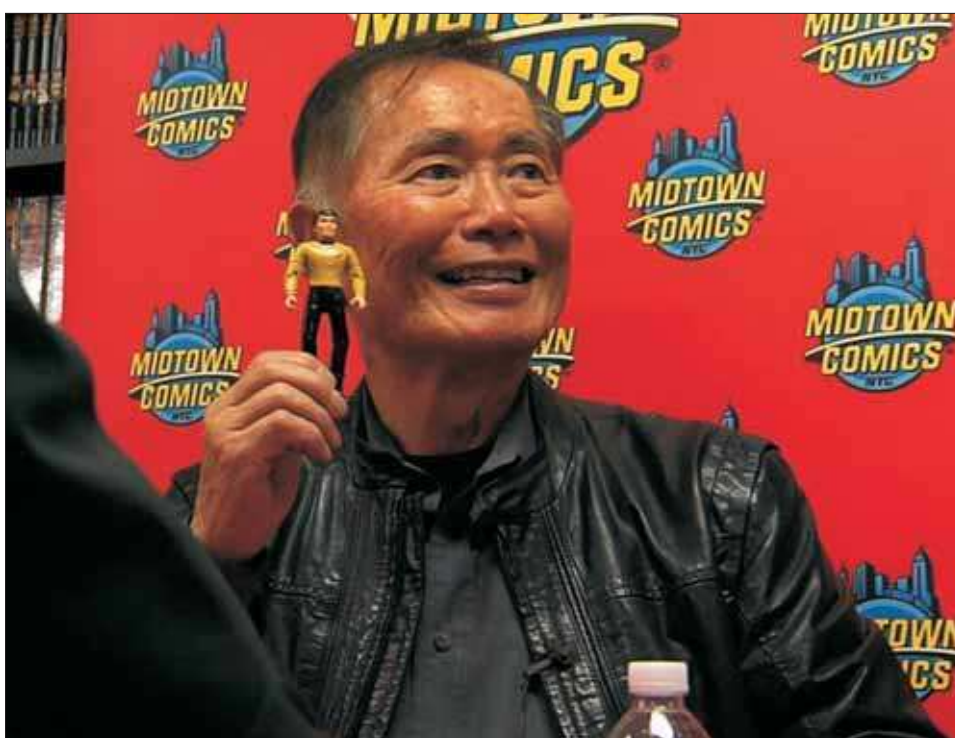
The Asian Reporter

George Takei may still be best known for his role as Mr. Sulu in the groundbreaking television show “Star Trek,” which not only explored controversial topics of its day such as racial equality, Cold War anxieties, and the Vietnam War, but it was also the first primetime show to feature a multiethnic cast. In Jennifer Klood’s biographical documentary *To Be Takei*, it becomes quickly evident that Takei has consistently taken on pioneering roles both on and off the screen.

The film opens with Takei and his husband, Brad Takei, going on a power walk through their Los Angeles neighborhood. Though George is older, he is clearly the fitter and sprier one, leaving Brad a few meters behind. Brad complains that George normally doesn’t walk this fast. They bicker a bit, negotiate over which direction to go next, and then the film leads us through the different avenues of Takei’s life.

What unfolds is a life that is “stranger than science fiction,” and the film explores a varied career that includes actor, public servant, activist, and cultural critic.

Born on April 20, 1937, Takei was just a boy when he and his family were sent to internment camps during World War II. Later, when the war finally ended and they returned to Los Angeles, the family



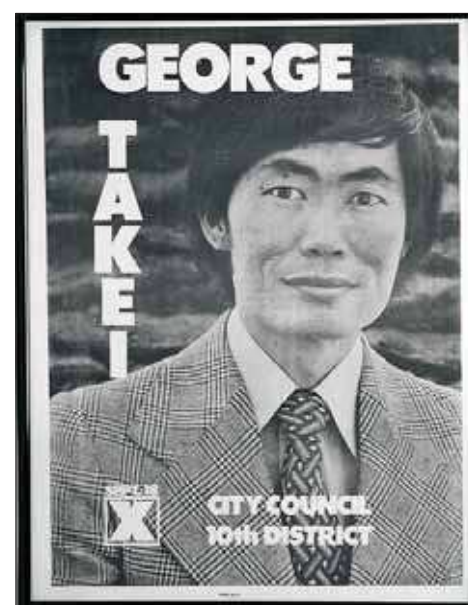
ACTOR & ACTIVIST. Filmmaker Jennifer Klood’s biographical documentary *To Be Takei*, which screens Sunday, May 18 at 7:00pm at McMenamins Kennedy School in Portland, follows the life of actor, public servant, activist, and cultural critic George Takei. After playing the role of Mr. Sulu in the groundbreaking television show “Star Trek,” Takei entered local politics (right photo). (Photos courtesy of Starz Digital Media)

struggled to find a place in the racist climate of the post-war period. From an early age, Takei always knew he wanted to act, and he took on a series of demeaning stereotypical roles to make a living, something he now regrets. His big break, however, came when he was cast by Gene Roddenbury to play Mr. Sulu. And the rest, as they say, is history.

After the series ended, Takei entered local politics, running for Los Angeles City Council and later serving with the Southern California Rapid Transit Dis-

trict from 1973 to 1984. He testified before congress in support of redress for Japanese-American internment. With the resurgent popularity of the “Star Trek” television show and movies, Takei again returned to acting and to the stage. This time, however, instead of remaining in the closet about his sexuality to protect his acting career, he came out as gay.

And when he did, he did so widely, going on television to take on homophobia, often with a fearless hilarity that has earned him a whole new generation of fans. In the



current struggle for marriage equality, Takei has again taken a vocal position on behalf of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) rights, often appearing with Brad to promote marriage equality.

The details of his life are presented through a self-conscious film that foregrounds blurring of the personal, the public, and the political. *To Be Takei* explores how the personal details of Takei’s life, notably his childhood experiences in the internment camp and the struggles of being a gay Asian-American actor, also become the platform of advocacy in his later years, suggesting that the roles he has taken on — activist, actor, civil servant, performer — are inseparable from each other.

The film also explores the process and constraints of documentary filmmaking

Continued on page 13



“The only way to grow is to get into larger projects—it’s a great way to learn,” says Neil Lee, principal of LEEKA Architecture and Planning and DBE contractor for the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Transit Project.

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