



ALEX ZAHARA STARGATE SG-1

You could say that Alex Zahara was born to be an actor. "My mom tells me that as a little kid I'd go behind the couch, put socks on my hands and put on puppet shows," he laughs. "When I was still very young I started watching old films and doing impressions of people like WC Fields. Imagine a pint-sized me walking around the house saying, 'Ah yes, my little chickadee'. So I've always been a performer." Zahara recently appeared as Dulann in *Babylon 5: Legend of the Rangers* and plays the recurring role of Ezekiel in the new Showtime series *Jeremiah*. This month, he guest stars in *Stargate SG-1* as the alien Xe'ls in *Spirits* and a hippie named Michael in 1969.

How did you prepare for the *Spirits* audition?

In the original character breakdown it described Xe'ls as 'an all-powerful shapeshifter who had protected the primitive people of this planet for over 1,000 years.' It also said that when he appears before these people he does so in the form of a raven. I figured he'd have a lot of bird-like qualities to him and maybe some of these would carry over to his humanoid form. So while I was practising I really strove to achieve bird-like characteristics - ie the head twitching and how birds twist and turn their head around. I tried to incorporate all that into my audition and the producers loved it. I did, however, play it down a bit when we began filming. There's such a thing as being too twitchy when you're doing a close-up in front of a camera.

Did you mind wearing the extensive make-up used when you played Xe'ls?

Nope, but it did take a little getting used to. When they put the mask on it went right across my nose and completely covered it, so I was talking as if I had a cold. They couldn't cut any more holes in the mask because there were already slits in it where they had tubes attached to these little air sacs that puffed up and down whenever Xe'ls would breathe. They finally were able to adjust the mask so it wasn't totally covering my nostrils. That helped but it was definitely a bit of a struggle at first.

Did anything amusing happen while you were filming the episode *Spirits*?

It was really hot in the studio and along with the mask I was also wearing this costume made out of Mylar. At one point I was lying down on a gurney and because it was so warm I fell asleep. The next thing I knew, Amanda Tapping [Major Samantha Carter] was gently shaking me and saying, "Alex, wake up, you're snoring." Thank God no one else heard me!

Do you have a favourite scene from 1969?

Yes. Now if you remember this story was set at the time of the Vietnam War. There's a final scene with my character of Michael and the SG-1 team where he's telling them, "I don't want to go to war." I said to the director Charles Correll, "You know, it's not that he doesn't want to go to war. The truth is he doesn't want to kill anyone or anything. Can we change the line around a bit?" Charles agreed and checked with the producers, all of whom said, "Okay". So we changed the line to reflect Michael's true feelings and it really made a big difference. That meant a lot to me.

Steven Eramo