

Transcript of the *Mosaica* Interview with Pushman Clark  
Originally broadcast on March 10, 2002

JW: *Good evening, and welcome to the March 10<sup>th</sup> edition of Mosaica. I'm your host, June Washburn, and it's my pleasure to be with you all again on this beautiful San Francisco evening. I'm also very excited to introduce our first guest for this evening, Mr. Pushman Clark. For those of you who are television buffs, the name should ring a bell—as should today's date. Because today marks the fortieth anniversary of the broadcast of the very first episode of that remarkable television series: The Adventures of Damion Koehkh, MD: Space Doctor. As a respected television historian, author of a forthcoming book on the series, and nephew to the series creator himself—San Francisco's own Ensign Clark— Mr. Clark is here to give us a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the making of this unique piece of television history. Welcome to the show, Mr. Clark.*

PC: Thank you, it's a pleasure to be here.

JW: *Now, at the time that The Adventures of Damion Koehkh, MD was first broadcast, in 1962, television was a virtually forgotten medium. Yet by the time the show completed its six-month run, an estimated four hundred and fifty thousand people a week—a record, I understand, for any television series—were watching. How do you account for that phenomenal success?*

PC: Well I can't, really. I *can* say that much of it had to do with an amazing series of coincidences. If Ensign Clark hadn't happened to meet Kim Jameson through a mutual acquaintance, the project would never have happened at all. If the antenna of Kim's station hadn't broken, and Jan Nilsson hadn't been called in to fix it, we would never have had such a fascinating lead character. If Elsie McGaughey of the *New Bohemian* hadn't happened to see the show at a friend's house (she didn't even own a television set), and on a whim decide to run a review in her newspaper, the videotapes of Doctor Koehkh would likely be nothing more than an amusing relic to pull out at family reunions and have a good laugh over.

JW: *But “chance” doesn't really explain it. There had to be something about the show that got people's attention.*

PC: Yes, of course. Sometimes, something about work of art—regardless of the medium—captures the imagination in an almost magical way, and that quality is such an ephemeral thing, it's often difficult, if not impossible, to say why it does what it does.

JW: *You knew the two creative forces behind the Doctor Koehkh television series—Ensign Clark, is of course, your uncle, and you also knew Kim Jameson. What were they like?*

PC: Well, my uncle was...a very strange man. Like so many brilliantly creative people, he was completely off his nut. Kim Jameson, on the other hand, was in many ways the exact opposite of Ensign: he was a technical genius, and one of the nicest people you would be likely to meet—and also completely off his nut so...I'm not sure what kind of conclusion you can draw about that. But in any case, they were completely dissimilar people, and yet their working chemistry was amazing. Ensign of course did all of the writing and directing, and made most of the production decisions—including casting. His peculiarly bizarre philosophy of science and theology is what really drove the series. However, that by itself wouldn't have had nearly the effect it did, without Kim's technical wizardry to animate it. And I'm not using the word “wizardry” lightly. How he managed to create a *mise-en-scene* on the scope of a universe—sometimes more than one—with almost no budget, and inside a tiny twenty-by-twenty-foot studio defies the imagination and probably the laws of physics. Artists working in television today are still trying to duplicate his techniques, with limited success.

JW: *Legend has it that Jan Nilsson, who played the part of Doctor Koehkh, had a very volatile personality. Is it true?*

PC: No, he was actually very even-tempered: He was simply *always* angry.

JW: *That must have made him very difficult to work with.*

PC: Yes and no. At least you always knew what to expect. And Ensign never minded very much, because he believed that most people were completely make believe anyway. He never took anything anybody did or said personally, because as far as he was concerned, none of what they did or said was real.

JW: *Were you ever on the show?*

PC: Of course. Everybody in the family was on the show at some time or another, because, you know, we'd work for free. Or, in my case, for ice cream—I was twelve at the time. I had a small part as a member of the Neko Felinious Gang in Episode 22: "The Outliers." I was Kitty #7, and my claim to fame was that I had to bite Joshua Flint on the leg. Luckily for me we did it in one take—the man had calves like iron.

JW: *And then the series ended—rather abruptly.*

PC: That depends on your perspective. My Aunt Brenda—Ensign's wife—always said the series dragged on entirely too long as it was. It was an extremely grueling project for everyone involved. Imagine running a marathon by hopping on one leg while balancing a screaming monkey on your head, throwing wads of money with one hand and composing poetry, and taking pictures with a camera with the other—for six months. Then you'll have an idea of what it was like to produce this show.

JW: *Who's the monkey?*

PC: Well, I—oh, my...

*(program is briefly interrupted)*

JW: *My goodness, that was exciting! We haven't had one of those in quite a while. Where was I? Oh, yes. So, what are the cast and crew doing now, after all these years?*

PC: Well, many of them unfortunately are no longer with us. Ensign died back in '92; Joshua Flint, who played the part of Doctor Stilts, was tragically killed in a street-dancing accident shortly after the series ended. Jan was killed in supermarket brawl in '91. Kim is retired, but he was an engineer on the Very Large Radio Antenna Array in New Mexico for over twenty years. He and Jan both worked on that project, actually. Corona Borman—who was Doctor Nine—went on to produce two other relatively successful television series, "Marxists Don't Wear Black" and "Cradpapple."

JW: *Yes, I remember hearing about that program—it caused quite a stir amongst the Manchurian royal family, didn't it?*

PC: I would say so. The riots in Peking lasted for three days after the first broadcast. But in recent years he's been focusing his talents on the stage. In fact, I believe he was just recently elected Cardinal to the Portland Diocese of the Church of Shakespeare. Carol White—Angelica—died in '95 after serving many years as an aid worker in the French Congo; George Kenyon—Doctor Gypsy—continued to work in Vaudeville until his death in '87. Both Carol and George had extensive collections of "Koehkh" memorabilia, which they both graciously donated to the Nation Museum of Television Arts in Idaho—a huge boon to those of us who loved the show.

JW: *Which brings us to the topic of your book. Tell us about it.*

PC: This is a project that I've been wanting to do for a number of years, and I was fortunate enough this year to find a publisher who was willing to take it on. The book will consist of some of the original scripts from the series—which should offer some surprises and interesting insights to Koehkh aficionados—as well as some photographs taken during production, and I believe that we will also be able to include some reproductions of the title illustrations, all of which were done by well-known visual artists.

JW: *We know you're an expert on the history of television—but what do you think about the future of television?*

PC: Who can say? Television is a relatively expensive medium to work in, which by itself limits the number of artists interested in it. And historically, it's been difficult for artists working in television to find an audience, mostly because people are typically looking for a more immediate, tactile, intimate art experience. Television is very remote, especially compared to, say interactive theater. But, having said that, I think that, like most media, in the correct hands, it has tremendous potential. In fact, I've just recently heard that a small theater company from Tallahassee is in the process of buying a number of television broadcasting stations around the country, with the idea of creating a country-wide "network" which they plan to operate as a kind of collective, making it available to anyone who wants to work in the medium. So who knows? Television may yet surprise us all.

JW: *Wouldn't that be fun? Let's hope it happens. Pushman, thank you very much for being with us this evening, and we very much look forward to reading your book.*

PC: Thank you very much for inviting me.

JW: *As a special treat for the television fans in our audience, for the first time in Mosaica history, a videotaped version of this interview will be broadcast tonight at nine forty-five on Television Channel 10, in cooperation with the Bay Area Independent Television Operators, as a prelude to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-broadcast of the complete series, The Adventures of Damion Koehkh, MD: Space Doctor. Stay tuned won't you? We'll return with our next guest—this year's World Speed Haiku Champion, Ludmila Karpovski-Sanches—after this word from our sponsor...*