Skater's life is no holiday on ice

By PAUL WILLISTEIN
Entertainment Editor

As an ice skater, Linda Fratianno just wants to have fun. Most of the time she does. But she doesn't really like traveling. And she doesn't like the cold.

She's been traveling for a long time. Still, the joy of performing before thousands of people makes it more than worthwhile for Olympic silver medalist Fratianno, who turned professional and now skates with Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom on Ice.

Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom on Ice, produced by Kenneth Feld, will be presented Tuesday through Oct. 27 at Lehigh University's Stabler Arena.

Fratianno, 25 and only 5 foot 2, delighted millions with her performance in the 1980 Olympics at Lake Placid, N.Y. She's been skating professionally ever since, first with the Ice Follies and Holiday on Ice. She's on the road for 10 months out of the year. The tour stops in 35 cities.

"I really don't like the traveling. People don't realize that I've been traveling since I've been 12 years old," Fratianno said in a recent telephone interview from Providence, R.I., where she was to perform with the Disney show. "I'm really tired of it, but I still like to perform and be in front of an audience."

Dr. Who, that's who

By GEOFF GEHMAN
Of The Morning Call

There were no evil Daleks fooling around with the camera. The good Doctor arrived without TARDIS, his flying police call box; his sonic screwdriver, or even his 15-to-20-foot-long scarf. There were no civilizations — past, present or future — to rescue; only television promotions to record.

On Thursday seven actors from the BBC science-fiction series "Doctor Who" popped into a studio at WLVT-TV, Channel 39. After arriving from King of Prussia, where they are the highlights of a weekend "Whovent" (read: conference), they taped spots for the public-TV station, which airs episodes Monday through Friday at 11 p.m. They were greeted by members of Friends of Doctor Who, a fan club in the Delaware and Lehigh valleys.

Although there were no monsters for Doctor Who to battle and no galaxies for him to zip through, the actors had a few tries at recreating the series' wacky, slightly menacing atmosphere. Before his promo began in earnest, Jon Pertwee, who played the title character in 1970-74, turned a microphone into an electric razor. Anthony Ainley, who stars as The Master, perhaps Doctor Who's most stimulating adversary, intoned to future watchers: "People of the earth, Pennsylania in particular ... I am The Master and you will obey me." He was heralded with a raspberry from Pertwee.

Stuntman/stunt coordinator Terry Walsh also chose mock intimidation. "Those of you who don't [watch], I'm going to send a bunch of very large people to your house," Carol Ann Ford (Susan, a Doctor Who granddaughter) adopted a more serious approach. The series, she informed the camera, "transcends boundaries of time, boundaries of space, boundaries of entertainment."

"Doctor Who" is indeed an operation with few boundaries. The title figure is a 750-year-old scholar and scientist who flits back and forth between millennia, seeking civilizations to protect and preserve. Since it debuted in England on Nov. 23, 1963 (the first episode was postponed briefly by prolonged news coverage of John F. Kennedy's death), he has visited Marco Polo's China, Julius Caesar's Rome and the Italy of Renaissance patrons and popes, not to mention the planet Pluto millions of years hence and contemporary London, temporary residence of the Loch Ness Monster. He is classless, racless and timeless — Everyman stuffed into a superhero's shell. He refuses to aid only those who are evil.

"The Doctor's someone you can always turn to," notes Stephen Labert, a senior at Bloomsburg University and a Whovian (read: "Doctor Who" fan) who attended Thursday's taping. "No matter what the situation he comes out in a winning position."

Sometimes he has trouble identifying villains. No matter that he has two hearts and 12 regenerations (read: lives, incarnations) and time travels with ease. He can be a klutz. "An American superhero like Superman knows what he's going to do and does it," begins Barbara Shewchuk, who runs the Delaware Valley version of Friends of Doctor Who. "The Doctor makes mistakes, he has his moods. He does things in the best intent for all life forms, but sometimes he stumbles a bit."

These are the Doctor's endearing human features. Among the nonhuman qualities viewers like are his impeccable morals, (in one episode he refuses to alter the Daleks' future destructiveness because he believes he'd be no better than them); sexlessness (he lusts after no woman); lack of violence ("I find that relaxing," says Labert), and his status as an outcast. Doctor Who, you see, interferes with history, behavior which his fellow time lords on the planet Gallifrey find objectionable. He just can't let a good civilization flounder.

This is a series you can accept as serious science fiction or serious put-on. Special effects are not stressed. This is not "Star Wars." Faraway planets resemble the English countryside; exotic creatures speak with English accents; some of the monsters look like they were made in somebody's basement laboratory. Writers conjure up sober moral issues and intriguing myths at the same time they have the Doctor bumble around, wear terribly mismatched clothes, and reply to
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an enemy, in a best blase fashion. “Will there be a strawberry jam for tea?” Like “Benny Hill” and “Monty Python,” Americans love this sort of off-the-wall English humor.

Apparently, so do the English. According to Nicola Bryant, who plays Peri Brown, “everyone knows Doctor Who” in England. Over there, she explains, it is more of a family show, although she would be surprised at the number of American mothers and sons who are gaga together.

English mothers and fathers remember watching the Beatles play themselves in an early 60s episode when William Hartnell (1953-66) played the Doctor. They’ve had a lot of fun watching five TV-series books, one film Doctor Doctor, who did two movies, and one TV-special Doctor, who played Hartnell in a 20th anniversary program. All those regenerations have proved very handy to them. A new Doctor not only keeps the program on the air, it generates new interest in it.

Regeneration plays a role in the States, too. Intrigue is fanned by the possibility of viewing newly imported episodes. Most of the more than 160 public TV stations carrying Doctor Who have aired only those segments starring Pertwee, his replacement, Tom Baker (1974-81) and Peter Davison (1981-84). Very few Americans have seen the early years with Hartnell and Patrick Troughton (1966-69) or the latest installments with Colin Baker.

What’s more, the U.S. distributor doesn’t always release them in chronological order, which, since the series consists of mini-series, can be confusing. What’s more, new episodes won’t be aired on the BBC until next September. No one knows when they will find their way to U.S. channels.

It’s enough to make one feel like a time lord, without the power.

In the meantime, there are enough “Doctor Who” items and “Doctor Who” fan clubs to satisfy the faithful. Dan Walter, who runs Cap’s Comic Cavalcade in Kansas, reports of a zealot who comes by in a 15-foot-long scarf, a trademark of Tom Baker’s Doctor. Bethlehem Whovian

Dr. Who fan waits to get picture signed by Jon Pertwee.

Scott Glenn owns comics and magazines, about 20 paperbacks, a picture disc, a 45 with the “Doctor Who” theme, a TARDIS money bank, a sonic screwdriver and a metal Dalek. He’s planning a second local fan group called Whovians of the Lehigh Valley.

When she isn’t knitting a 24-foot-long scarf or editing the newsletter for the Lehigh Valley chapter of Friends of the Doctor, Leatrice Martucci of Bethlehem videotapes episodes and attends Whoevents with her son, Stephen Lander. The pair have been known to dress up and man the phones during WLVT’s pledge week. They will perform these tasks Dec. 2, when Channel 36 airs its third “Doctor Who” Night.

Perhaps they could recruit Pete Townsend, late of The Who, for a WLVT promo. Can you imagine it? “I want my Who TV!”

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