COLIN BAKER

The Cat Who Walks by Himself

Public recognition, acting philosophy and fluffy felines are all on the mind of the sixth incarnation of Doctor Who.

BY PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

Colin Baker has just come from a birthday party held for him at a Who convention and his arms are filled with the presents fans have given him. However, all of them are cats—cat statues, stuffed cats, cat mugs, cat posters. As the sixth actor in the enigmatic leading role of Britain's long-running Doctor Who, Baker wears a cat-shaped pin on his lapel, an item he added to the Time Lord's costume.

"I have four cats, and I've collected cats for a long time—ceramic ones, fluffy ones, all sorts—so it was the first idea that came to me for my personal addition to the sixth Doctor," he reveals. "There's a quote I ran across, 'I'm the cat who walks by himself, and all times and places are the same to me,' which fits, I think, the Doctor's character. It's a symbol that he might find appealing. It's said of a cat that you never own it, and that it's never predictable. That's true of the Doctor. No one actor can ever be the whole of the Doctor."

Who Orientation

The 42-year-old Baker, who is attempting to be at least one-sixth of the Doctor, following in the footsteps of William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker and Peter Davison, went to grade school in Manchester, England. He began, at 21, to study law (a profession which still shows in his precise, careful and erudite turn of phrase). Five years later, he turned to acting, enrolling at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. A tour with a repertory company followed his graduation.

His first major TV role was as "bad guy"
With production resumed on *Dr. Who*, Colin Baker is ready to board the Tardis once more for new adventures.

Paul Merroney in the 1970s British TV serial *The Brothers*. He has since appeared in a number of series, including guest shots as Bayban the Butcher in the *Blake’s 7* episode “The City at the Edge of the World,” and as Commander Maxil in the 1983 *Who* episode “Arc of Infinity.”

Despite such a varied background, most actors would be worried about the impact a role like the Doctor might have on a future career. After all, Peter Davison (STARLOG #102) explained that he limited his tenure in the role to three years, in part, due to a fear of typecasting. Yet, Baker says he has no qualms about remaining in the role as long as the BBC and producer John Nathan-Turner (STARLOG #82) will have him. In fact, he all but leaped at the chance to play the part.

“My first thought, when John approached me about the part was: Damn, I’m going to be uncool, and give it all away, by saying ‘Yes, please. Can I start tomorrow?’ I don’t believe in saying, ‘Well, I’ll have to think about it,’ when you know damn well you mean ‘Yes.’ So, I was delighted. I was honored, because I have great respect for all the actors who have played the part in the past. The idea that I might be elevated to their distinguished company was very appealing.

“If an actor always worried about being typecast, he might never do anything in which he might be good,” Baker elaborates. “The only reason actors get typecast is because the public associates them strongly with a particular role, which means they were good in it. If an actor didn’t want to be good, I don’t know why he would do anything.”

“The danger of typecasting comes partly from the public, and principally from the people in the business. It’s more often the producers and directors who say, ‘Uh-uh, he played James Bond, the public won’t be able to take it.’ The public, I believe, can take different people playing different parts. I certainly wouldn’t avoid playing roles like Doctor Who because of what might happen in the future. The BBC might want me to play it for 15 years, and I might be happy to do so—who cares about being typecast after that?”

“I’ve set no time limit on playing the role. What happens to me—if and whenever I leave—remains to be seen. You can’t actually worry about what will happen if you take a job, you must take each job one at a time, and hope that someone still remembers that you’re an actor and therefore capable of doing other roles. I’ve had a career which lasted 15 years before I played Doctor Who, so I’m sure it won’t irreparably damage me.”

The series has been around, too, outlasting actors, producers and BBC execs, even weathering a production hiatus. “Doctor Who is a program that has survived for a long time,” Baker says, “on very meager resources. In some terms, it’s a lot of money, but compared to the sums spent on similar programs in the U.S., it’s not much. And a lot is required from it. The studio time is precious, and everyone is very keyed up. It means that when everything is set and ready—and sometimes, it takes enormous amounts of time to set up—that there isn’t time to relax about the way you do it. So, you tend to get it right the first time.”

Baker’s view of the role includes a list of characteristics he feels are common to all six incarnations of the Doctor, but it’s a list he’s reluctant to publicize. “The danger about putting those ideas into words is that people will then say, ‘Ah, but in the 13th minute of episode four, you weren’t being at all—fill in

**Who Recognition**

In his brief time in the role, Colin Baker has had few experiences with the public recognition spotlight which both bedevilled and

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**Baker Ballyhoos New “Who”**

Doctor Who will return for new adventures. That’s a report Colin Baker proudly confirms as filming begins this month on a new season of *Who* for airing in England this fall and elsewhere, later. “I can promise a very good season,” the actor announces. “The storylines are very exciting. What I think has come out in season 22 [Baker’s first as the Doctor after Peter Davison’s departure] is that some of the long-term better writers of *Dr. Who*, people like Robert Holmes, are telling a good yarn, while, at the same time, tackling some larger issues. With things like ‘Vengeance on Varos,’ aside from the story

Colin Baker plans to remain as the Doctor for as long as the BBC and producer John Nathan-Turner will have him.
delighted his predecessors, although he has one tale about a recent flight to the United States. "Like Peter Davison, my face was fairly well-known, in England anyway, because I had already been in a long-running series," he says. "So, I was used to a certain amount of recognition, but it dramatically increased after the announcement that I would play the part, and there was another huge increase after the first story was shown. Now, I know that wherever I go, people will know who I am—which just shows how many people watch the program. I was amazed that, on the flight from London on TWA, the American stewardess said, 'Hello, Doctor.' I wasn't expecting that many Americans to know me. It's only the dedicated Who-watchers in America who know who plays the Doctor.

"It's not so much that the attention one sometimes gets is unwelcome as it is time-consuming. You're trying to get from A to Z, and at points H, J, K, L on the way, people want you to stop and talk. There doesn't seem to be any way to handle it, really, short of actually being rude to them—'Can't talk. Goodbye.'—which you can't do, because the word spreads very quickly," he explains. "If you're brusque with someone, or however politely you put them off, they say, 'That Colin Baker... got no time for the public at all!' Because they see you on television, they think you're public property. You're in their home: 'If you're in my house every day, why can't you talk to me now?' They don't consciously think that way, but there's a subconscious attitude. That can be difficult. So, you try to avoid situations like that—which Peter Davison did by disguising himself."

Doctor Who is a tradition in Great Britain, dating back more than 20 years. Becoming a part of such a television tradition must give an actor pause, at least to consider why the series has survived this long. "I knew the reason, I would probably be putting on programs that last for 20 years. One can only guess at the ingredients," Baker confesses.

"It began at a time when there wasn't any television science fiction of any kind, and it never attempted—and has still resisted the temptation—to be the sort of heavy, technical Star Wars-type of extravaganza. It has always remained true to its origins. It is uniquely British in its way. It doesn't rely too much on gimmickry or hardware. You don't have the great revolving wheels in space and all those wonderful things that movies can do."

(continued on page 50)

on the surface, there's also the theme of "is violence on television good or bad?" It deals with a planet where people are subjected to real violence on TV as a means of keeping them suppressed.

"This is where Dr. Who can expand in the future. Without becoming a preaching program, you can tell a story and at the same time leave a thought at the end."

Baker, who possesses an impish smile, becomes introspective when talking about the one-year hiatus imposed by the BBC as a cost-cutting measure (STARLOG #95).

"It was irritating," he admits with a weary frown. "Just when I got the ball rolling in playing the part, as it were, to suddenly find it taken away was frustrating."

Throughout that year in limbo, the curly-haired actor was bound to a BBC contract, which compelled him to turn down offers for on-stage drama productions. "The problem is, that, I could take a risk and do this or that job, but if Michael Grave [the current BBC Controller, who heads the network] resigned and a new Controller took over and said, 'OK, let's get Dr. Who right back into production,' and I was doing something else while I was under contract, I could be in terrible trouble. So, it has restricted my year's activities," Baker says.

Announcement of the production hiatus caught Baker by surprise—and so did the controversy which followed in its wake.

"The fans went berserk!" he recalls. "There were headlines in national newspapers that said: 'Dr. Who Axed!' The press overreacted, which meant fans treated it as gone forever. The BBC then issued a statement saying, 'No, it's not gone forever—just for a year.' The press then said, 'We have saved Dr. Who!' That somewhat overstated the case, too."

The dreaded fan rumor machine was also a problem. "All the rumors kept coming back to me about me being replaced, the producer [John Nathan-Turner] being replaced, me refusing to ever appear on the show again because I'm out of joint for not being able to work for a year," Baker recalls. "All of these reports are gross exaggerations of the truth; in fact, they aren't true.'"

Although fans are pleased that new episodes are forthcoming (and American fans will be seeing Baker second season segments in a few months), Baker says that the quantity (though not quality) may be disappointing. "We had 13 50-minute episodes in the last season, which is the equivalent of 26 half-hour episodes," Baker notes. "When the BBC said, 'Panic not, Dr. Who is coming back and you'll get even more episodes than you have before,' that means 14 half-hours—more episodes, but less overall content. So, the next season will only be 14 half-hours or three stories, which will be shown in weekly half-hours from September through December in Britain."

Colin Baker is obviously happy to put the hiatus behind him and says he looks forward to many more seasons of portraying the somewhat eccentric alien. "It's the best role on television," he declares.

—Julius Fabrini

JULIUS FABRINI, Connecticut-based writer, profiled George Takei in issue #101.
of NIMH from Don Bluth (now known as Sullivan Studios) from MGM/UA in VHS/Beta HiFi surround sound at the bargain price of $29.95. The pre-1948 Warner cartoons have belonged to United Artists Television for some years now. MGM/UA has collected seven of its treasures under the title, The Best of Bugs Bunny & Friends in VHS/Beta HiFi to complement the recent multi-volume release from Warner's post-1948 cartoons. Best includes: Porky and Daffy in "Duck Soup to Nuts" (1944), Bugs' bid for the Oscar in "What's Cookin', Doc?" (1944), "Bedtime for Sniffles" (1940), the Oscar-winning "Tweetie Pie" (1947), "Nothing But the Truth" (1933), Tex Avery's "A Feud There Was" (1938) and "The Little Lion Hunter" (1939) with Inki. The price is the same as the Warner series, $19.95.

Embassy Home Entertainment has joined the ranks of discount dealers with a special 20 title videocassette assortment for $29.95 each until April 4. Genre titles spotlighted are Keir Dullea in Brainwaves (1982), the alien visitors of Wavelength (1983), Steve Reeves in the original Hercules (1959) and Stephen King's Children of the Corn (1984).

USA Home Video is debuting a new series entitled Sybil Danning's Adventure Video, which will include everything from martial arts films through Westerns, chase features and period action dramas. Among the first of the bi-monthly videocassettes will be selected episodes of Space: 1999, two shows on each videocassette, and selected segments of Roger Moore's first adventures in spy life, The Saint, also two shows per videocassette. Danning will introduce each volume.

Just about everybody seems to be leaning onto the band wagon to release old TV series to home video viewers. Mystery fans may be interested by MCA Home Video's release of eight episodes each from The Hardy Boys (Parker Stevenson and Shawn Cassidy) and Nancy Drew (Pamela Sue Martin). All titles are VHS Beta HiFi, $19.95 each and approximately 47 minutes long.

Karl-Lorimar Home Video announces the release of the original feature-length Challenge of the Gobots (100 minutes). This popular Saturday morning animated series spin-off chronicles the origin of the Gobots in VHS and Beta, $39.95.

New World Video has just unleashed Larry Cohen's The Stuff (laserdisc and videocassette). Viewers should be warned not to eat ice cream while watching this movie. And for B-movie thrills and chills, what could be better than 1960's Dinosauras! The ad copy tells it all: "See the taming of a giant 60-ton brontosaurus by a young boy! See a tyrannosaurus crush a crowded bus like an eggshell! See what happens when a hairy Neanderthal Man comes face to face with a beautiful modern girl! And see tons of invincible steel battle 100,000 pounds of animal ferocity in a duel to the death?" Great! Pass the popcorn.

—David Hutchison

Medialog

(continued from page 9)

greenlighted for further horrors. The syndicated half-hour anthology series from Laurel Entertainment has been renewed for two more years with new episodes scheduled for the 1986-87 and 1987-88 seasons. The series will also be available for daily broadcast in 1987 with the 90-odd episodes airing as a weekday rerun strip.

HBO's Ray Bradbury Theater earned three ACE (Award for Cable Excellence) citations. Bradbury was honored for Best Writing for a Dramatic Series while James Coco and Christopher Mitch earned nods for respectively Best Actor and Best Direction in a Dramatic Series for their work in the "Marianettes Inc." segment.

Character Castings: Brian Dennehy—late of Cocoon and F/X—is turning to comedy-drama in Legal Eagles, co-starring with Robert Redford, Debra Winger and Daryl Hannah (STARLOG #103). Elyz Barkin, the Russian actor who was so poigniant in 2010 (STARLOG #91), has joined the cast of The Name of the Rose, (which stars Sean Connery and F. Murray Abraham).

David Cronenberg's remake of The Fly is underway in Canada, from a script by Cronenberg and Charles Edward Pogue (STARLOG #102). Jeff Goldblum (STARLOG #85) stars as the troubled scientist. Geena (Sara) Davis and John (Blood Simple) Gets co-star. Peter (Superger) Cook and Herbert (Dead Zone) Lom topline Whoops Apocalypsic—which certainly sounds like a comedy of nuclear proportions. Christopher (Back to the Future) Lloyd (STARLOG #82) and Dee (T. Wallace-Stone star in White Dragon, a fantasy adventure lensed in Europe, Dennis (Enemy Mine) Quaid (STARLOG #79) and Ellen (Buckaroo Banzai) Barkin are, meanwhile, engaged in Nothing But the Truth, a law enforcement drama.

Joining Rodney Dangerfield in the comedic rush to get Back to School are Keith (Dressed to Kill) Gordon, M. Emmett (Blood Simple) Walsh and Adrienne (Swamp Thing) Barbeau (STARLOG #49).

Cartoonwise, listen for Don Messick to reprise his role as Dr. Benton Quest in Jonny Quest, a syndicated revival of the beloved 1964 Hanna-Barbera series. Look for an interview with the multi-voiced Messick upcoming in STARLOG.

That Greatest American Hero, William Katt, continues as Paul Drake, Jr, working with his mother, actress Barbara Hale (Della Street), and Godzillas's favorite co-star, Raymond Burr, in a continuing series of NBC TV movies featuring Perry Mason & company. Next up: The Case of the Notorious Nun.

People: William Peter Blatty has penned a comedy version, spoofing the events of his classic novel, The Exorcist. The screenplay, Demons 5, Exorcists 0, examines the lighter side—if there is one—of possession. Didn't they already do that, albeit not intentionally, with The Exorcist II: The Heretic?

—David McDonnell

Baker

(continued from page 25)

"Its central character is comparable, I suppose, to those other great pseudo-heroes—like Sherlock Holmes—who, whilst being the story's center, nevertheless have character flaws, weaknesses. And even though, in the end, they're always correct, triumphant, whatever, the process isn't as smooth as you otherwise might think. And the character of the Doctor himself is as much a part of the story as the storyline."

Baker observes that, in Britain, high regard for Doctor Who is not limited to the show's fans. "I think in England it has acquired a cultish following, not just in the viewers but also in the actors who appear in it," he says. "The most prestigious actors in England are always happy to take a part in Doctor Who. Which means that, in every story, there are four or five actors who are very, very good, accomplished exponents of their craft. On each cast list I get, I see that there are four or five actors listed with whom I've wanted to work for many years. It's wonderful to get the chance. It does mean the end-result is usually about as good as can be."

And what does all that mean to the show itself? After 21 years on the air, has Doctor Who established a philosophy, a way of looking at life, at the world? The newest Doctor doesn't think so. "I don't think there's a conscious philosophy," Baker ventures.

"I was very impressed recently, watching an interview with Steven Spielberg. He was being questioned about his attitude toward his work, and he said that he believed his responsibility as a filmmaker was to provide entertainment, to make the sort of films he would want to go and see, films which would excite, films full of adventure, romance and spectacle."

"Yes, of course, there's room for films about people coming home from Vietnam, scarred by their experience, but you won't get millions and millions of people queuing up to see those films, because many people don't want to be depressed when they have their three hours of recreation in the evening. They want to be uplifted and carried into other worlds, science-fiction people particularly."

"I'm a great SF reader myself. I find a great deal of romance—not in the gooy, modern sense of the word, but the values of chivalry and the like—and it really does stir me. The Spielberg films, the two Indiana Jones movies, are like that. It's a world, alas, that's about as far removed from our own as you can get. It's a world that I think most people, at heart, would like to be a part of; where purity of purpose and the quest become important things, where people will risk all for friendship, truth and honesty."

"In a sense, Doctor Who is a part of that tradition," Colin Baker explains. "It's the more bumbling part, the string-and-brown-paper version, as opposed to the flashy version. The reason it commands such affection is that Doctor Who is part of those old-fashioned ideals, expressed in a futuristic way."