As the first female Doctor Who in the show’s 55-year history, Jodie Whittaker may have “big boots to fill” – but she says all the rules have changed...

INTERVIEWS BY
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In a warm studio in south Wales, Jodie Whittaker is having fun. Posing for a Radio Times cover shoot just metres from a looming blue police box, the 36-year-old swirls her coat, bops to Beyoncé and, with a smile on her face, jumps into the air and swings her arms.

Given the carefree scene, you could easily forget she's about to make history and that the success of a hit TV global franchise and the reputation of its new showrunner, Chris Chibnall, rests on her shoulders.

"I felt the time was right for a female Doctor - I felt the audience were ready for it, the world was ready for it," says Chibnall of his decision to cast Whittaker as the time-travelling, millennia-old alien who for more than half a century has been exclusively played by men - most recently Peter Capaldi.

"I think if we hadn't done it, we would have been behind the world - and Doctor Who has to be out front leading the world, showcasing all the amazing things out there. So it was never a question in my mind. It was time."

"There's the chiselled superhero that we're used to seeing and we've all grown up with," Whittaker adds after finishing her photoshoot, in her new Doctor's rainbow T-shirt, gold braces and high-waisted culottes, "but Doctor Who has never been that, which is wonderful. It's attainable in so many ways.

"And now it isn't just attainable for half of the population. The other half can be the Doctor as well. Girls will no longer just think, 'Oh, I could be a companion.' Being the first female Doctor and showing children that their heroes in shows don't always look the same is a huge honour for me."

Whittaker will make her full debut when the series starts in the autumn, but when she was unveiled as the 13th incarnation of the Time Lord after last summer's Wimbledon men's final, the short introductory clip was viewed online more than 16 million times in just three days.

The film, which saw a hooded Whittaker emerge from a forest and stride purposefully towards the Tardis, made headlines around the planet and ignited interest not only from die-hard fans but from both new and lapsed viewers, too. Did Whittaker immediately feel the pressure of expectation?

"The pressure on any actor coming into the role - man or woman - is huge because they're big boots to fill. And for me there's been 12 pairs of boots. Well, 13 if you count..."
NEW WHO
The Doctor (Jodie Whittaker) with Ryan (Tosin Cole), Graham (Bradley Walsh) and Yasmin (Mandip Gill)

< [50th anniversary guest star] John Hurt. Then we could throw in David Bradley [from the last Christmas special]! That's a lot of boots!

"But I was obviously delighted that when my name was announced, I wasn't completely slated - although maybe I was? Maybe I was just given sugar-coated information because everyone I spoke to was like, 'People love you!' As long as most people are happy, I'm all right with that because the fans are so loyal and so passionate, and it's a huge deal to them. And obviously for Whovians this time the change has taken a very different direction than it has before.

"In a way, though, there is liberation in that new direction: the pressure is less for me because I can only do this my way. All the rules are out the window! That's what makes it so fun."

ACCORDING TO CHIBNALL, that sense of fun is reflected in the new Doctor's personality. "Jodie came in and read for the part and blew us all away," he says. "She was the Doctor straight away. She brings a fresh perspective to the role - a lot of fun and energy. When you're casting the Doctor, you instinctively know when you see something Doctor-y - and there's also an excitement you get with a Doctor you haven't seen before.

"That's what Jodie brings. She's absolutely the Doctor. But there's a new calibration, a new mixture of Doctorliness. Her auditions were so good they made casting her incredibly simple.

"The 13th Doctor is incredibly lively, warm, funny, energetic, inclusive - she's the greatest friend you could wish to have as your guide around the universe."

For now, audiences will have to take his word for it - and details of the storylines, guest stars and monsters remain a closely guarded secret.

But for Whittaker that's all part of the experience: "I love all the secrecy. It was like that when I worked with Chris on Broadchurch, too. I'd ask, 'Can I see that?' - 'No' - 'OK.'

"But I don't want to know. I never watch trailers of films I want to go and see. For me, the unknown is the most exciting thing. The best times I've had with television or film, or theatre, is walking in and not knowing anything about it. Although hopefully the first time I see it won't be when it airs. We're obviously terrified of leaks, but hopefully we'll be able to see it beforehand.

"But this is Doctor Who, so we know there will be a Tardis, a sonic screwdriver - and me and my new friends [which is what companions are now called]. We've all had the best time making it, so hopefully you don't hate it!"

On the day the revamped Doctor Who does emerge from the shadows, the team are hoping a whole new generation of fans will be tuning in.

"If you've never seen Doctor Who, or want to introduce your children or family and friends to it, this series is the perfect point to start," says Chibnall. "It was really important to me that there's no barrier to entry. You don't need to know about anything that's come before. We've got a new Doctor, all-new characters, all-new monsters, all-new stories. It's going to be exciting, emotional and the most enormous fun."
BRADLEY WALSH

How did you feel when you got the part of Graham?
Oh, it was absolutely sensational. It’s the best job, bar none. It was very exciting when Chris Chibnall [with whom Walsh worked on Law & Order: UK] and Matt Stevens [Whose executive producer] took me to lunch and asked me about the role. I used to watch Doctor Who as a child with William Hartnell and Pat Troughton in the black-and-white days, so being cast is brilliant.

And when it was announced?
There was obviously a fuss about the first female Doctor and I think the casting of Jodie Whittaker is a stroke of genius from Chris, but I didn’t really pay a lot of attention to it all. I don’t do any social media so I’m a bit oblivious. I only just started doing Instagram.

You’ve spent nine months filming. How does it feel now it’s nearly finished?
Exhausted! But it’s been brilliant. Everyone’s so lovely – all the crew, cast and producers have just been fantastic. I’m still working on [game show] The Chase, so when I’m not in Cardiff for Doctor Who I’m in the ITV studio making three shows a day from 10 o’clock in the morning until 7 o’clock at night. Luckily I just let the producers at ITV and the BBC do all the plate-spinning and date-sorting. They’re fantastic – my thanks to both ITV and BBC for letting me do these jobs concurrently.

Where will you be watching it?
I hope I’ll be watching it live. Why would I escape the country? Why would you do that? Why would you not watch a product you’re so proud of? I can’t wait to watch it in the cold light of day. I think everyone on the show has worked so hard on it, and it’s something everyone should be very proud of.

MEET THE DOCTOR’S NEW FRIENDS

“We’ve got a new Doctor, all-new characters, all-new monsters, all-new stories”

CHRIS CHIBNALL
MANDIP GILL

How did you feel when you got the part of Yasmin?
I was so excited. It was a long, complicated process and I really wanted it, so it was a tense time. I remember going for a walk to get it out of my head when my agent phoned. The minute she told me I burst out crying.

And when it was announced?
It was nice. I was at a wedding and obviously my social media got a bit excited for a while. But it died down quite fast. The other day there was a lady opposite me on the train reading Doctor Who Magazine with a picture of me in it. I was like, "Oh, my God, that's me!" But she didn't have a clue.

What was the first day like?
Really nerve-racking. But I'd worked with Tosin before on Hollyoaks so it felt like I had a friend on set. And I instantly got on with Jodie.

How does it feel now that filming has nearly finished?
What I find the weirdest is, I could have carried a baby in that time.

Where will you be watching it?
I do actually like to watch my stuff. I don't have too many friends and family in London, but I'll gather my three people together for the first episode – I'll have to pre-warn them about my weird run. I've obviously never seen myself running and when I did, I was like, "Oh no, not like that!"

You're a diverse cast – when you were growing up, would you have liked to have seen more people of colour on screen?
When I was younger I didn't feel I was represented in popular culture – you couldn't get a brown doll in the shops and you didn't see many brown people on TV; I thought I was going to be the first brown person on The Bill. And now there's going to be millions of other people watching me and relating to my character. What's really exciting for me is I've got a two-year-old niece – who does have a brown doll – and I am going to make her dress up as my character. Is that weird? I wanted her to be a mini-me and she has no choice.

TOSIN COLE

How did you feel when you got the part of Ryan?
Pretty cool, to be honest. I can never really read the room at auditions. There are times when you think, "I killed that!" and you never get a callback. I thought I did all right... and then I got the call and got excited.

And when it was announced?
Everything for me has still been kind of chilled. Obviously it might be the quiet before the storm. When it comes out, I might not be saying this, but life is still normal. When it airs and the fans engage, this cool persona might go out the window. I hope I'll still be able to go to the shop in my slippers – it would be nice for those simple things to stay the same.

How does it feel now that filming has nearly finished?
It'll be good to release all the secrecy, all the tension of keeping things quiet. And it will be nice, after all the hard work that everyone's been through, for the audience to see it. Hopefully we'll have good feedback.

Where will you be watching it?
I normally don't watch things when they come out... I don't even tend to invite people to screenings. But maybe I'll make an exception and watch this with the family. That might be a new tradition for me.

You're a diverse cast – when you were growing up, would you have liked to have seen more people of colour on screen?
I used to watch Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and My Wife and Kids because it's easier to relate to what you see around you. That's not to say that I didn't watch other shows but there's an easier acceptance when you see something familiar to you.

Now diversity is more of a discussion, whether it be gender or ethnicity. We still have a long way to go, in terms of equal rights and equal representation on screen, but it's exciting for the kids to see people like themselves in the new series – and for girls to become superheroes! Hopefully we will inspire and touch people.