



DOCTOR WHO 50TH ANNIVERSARY

PRIME TIME LORD

'Doctor Who' rides its show's global appeal as it travels toward its next 50 years

By Andrew Barker

WHEN SCOTTISH ACTOR Peter Capaldi was unveiled as the Twelfth Doctor for the upcoming 50th anniversary season of BBC's "Doctor Who" earlier this summer, the news made waves worldwide, dominating discussion on Twitter feeds and entertainment sites for days. And perhaps that shouldn't be surprising for a major casting switch on a show that's currently seen by tens of millions of viewers in 50 countries. Yet for a property that was still sitting in mothballs less than a decade ago, such attention served as a testament to the Doctor's impressive renewal as an international brand, and to the commitment with which a few devoted Whovians have nourished it back to health.

For example, when lifelong "Doctor Who" fan Russell T. Davies first leveraged his renown as creator of Brit hits "Queer as Folk" and "Bob & Rose" to revive the show for the BBC in 2005, he certainly wasn't overrun with optimistic well-wishers.

"I had people queuing up at the door to tell me it was the wrong thing to do,"

THE 12 DOCTORS

1. William Hartnell (1963-1966)
2. Patrick Troughton (1966-1969)
3. Jon Pertwee (1970-1974)
4. Tom Baker (1974-1981)
5. Peter Davison (1982-1984)
6. Colin Baker (1984-1986)
7. Sylvester McCoy (1987-1996)
8. Paul McGann (1996)
9. Christopher Eccleston (2005)
10. David Tennant (2005-2010)
11. Matt Smith (2010-2013)
12. Peter Capaldi (2013 -)

Davies remembers. "Although it was a beloved part of British television, it was still an old, clapped-out, children's science fiction show. When I first talked to my agent and talked to my peers about it, it was a little bit like saying 'I'm going to devote my career to the Power Rangers.' People were looking at me kind of incredulously."

The show's resurrection after a 16-year absence was unusual in a number of ways. For one, the BBC, thanks to the support of controller and clandestine "Who" fan Jane Tranter, granted Davies and executive producer Julie Gardner a 13-episode initial run (most U.K. dramas are portioned into six-episode orders), and expanded the show from its traditional half-hour format to a full hour. And perhaps more importantly, Davies was installed as an American-style showrunner with full creative control, which was then a rather unusual model for a U.K. series.

But as for making sure the reboot caught on, "the big question was whether it would find a family audience," Gardner says. "When you're on BBC1 at 7 p.m. on a Saturday, you have to speak to a universal viewership."

As current executive producer Brian Minchin notes, "It could have fallen into the trap that sometimes cult shows can, where they're only concerned with appealing to their niche. Like a lot of people, I suspected it would come back as a cult show, but instead they brought it back as this warm, mainstream drama."

Selling it, however, was a different matter altogether. Davies recalls that the BBC conducted internal polling prior to "Who's" 2005 premiere that predicted the show would be a failure. As it neared broadcast, the network even worked up an emergency contingency plan in case the first three episodes failed to ignite interest. Yet the show kicked off with a bang, culling more than 10 million viewers for its debut episode, "Rose." Since then, British audiences for the revived "Doctor Who" have never dipped below 6 million, and 2007 Christmas special "Voyage of the Damned" attracted more than 13 million viewers, giving it the U.K.'s second-highest ratings of the year.

But even with the home country onboard, launching the show elsewhere, especially in America, was a much tougher fight. For its first few seasons, U.S. broadcast rights were sold to the Sci-Fi Channel (now Syfy), which ran the episodes on a year-long delay.

"It did well on Sci-Fi, considering it had very little support," opines Gardner, though Davies is less diplomatic.

"It was a very big mistake," he says. "It was madness that this one executive, who must have been insane, sold it to the wrong channel. No offense to Sci-Fi, but it was just an acquisition to them, it was just filler."

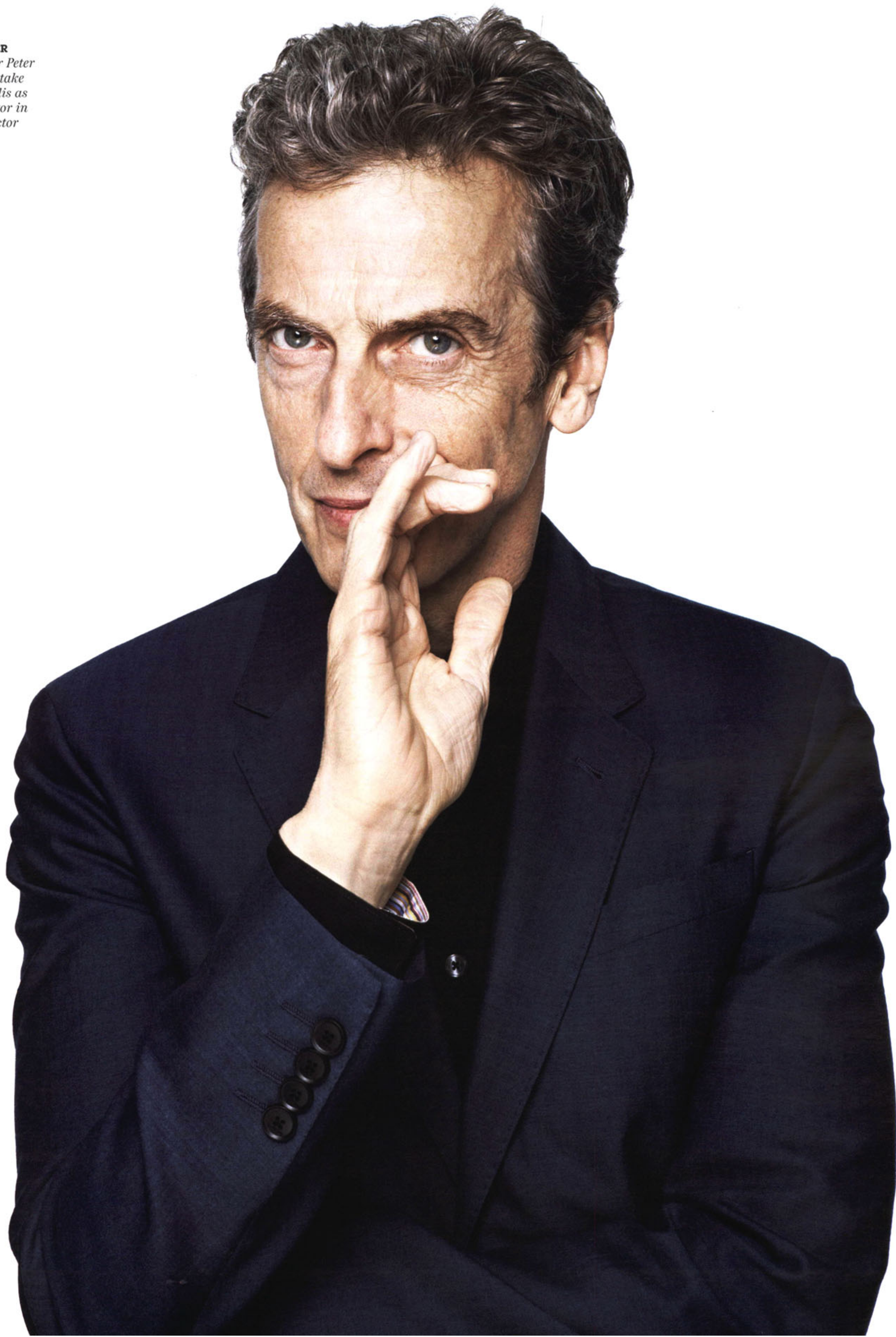
Once BBC America became the show's first stop Stateside in 2011 — airing episodes concurrently with the U.K. — the show's fortunes quickly began to improve, with its U.S. popularity cresting over the last 12 months. Last March, a "Doctor Who" episode notched the second-highest ratings in BBC America's history. The record-holder was set a year ago, also by "Doctor Who." The show's availability on Netflix also helped allowed viewers to dive into earlier episodes.

But with a growing, diversifying following can come the temptation to chase ever more viewers in farther-flung territories, a temptation that current showrunner Steven Moffat, another lifelong Whovian who took over from Davies in 2010, says he's careful to avoid to keep from changing the tenor of the show.

"I don't know how to pander to a British audience, let alone an American one," he says. "And you're always wrong when you try to make something appeal to a wider demographic or international fanbase. It's a very, very British show, but I think Americans like that about

NOW, VOYAGER

Scottish actor Peter Capaldi will take over the Tardis as the 12th Doctor in the next "Doctor Who" series.



it. I always like it when a show is really American. Even if I don't get all of it, and even if it took me years to figure out what Thanksgiving was — you appear to have two Christmases, which confused the hell out of me — I quite liked the fact that it was different."

So if not its dyed-in-the-wool Britishness, what was it that previously prevented the show from attaining the kind of ubiquity it enjoyed in the U.K. elsewhere? If you ask Davies, one of the biggest hurdles that "Who" faced on its initial run was simply its budget.

"In a funny way, 'Doctor Who' had to wait until technology was able to make it look right," Davies says. "It's finally made on a standard with the rest of American stuff. If you look at 'Doctor Who' from the '60s, it simply doesn't look anywhere as good as 'Star Trek' from the '60s. Now it's handsomely done."

Yet that's not to say that the show doesn't still run into budgetary issues, and avoiding the appearance of production patchwork becomes ever more vital as the show's viewership broadens.

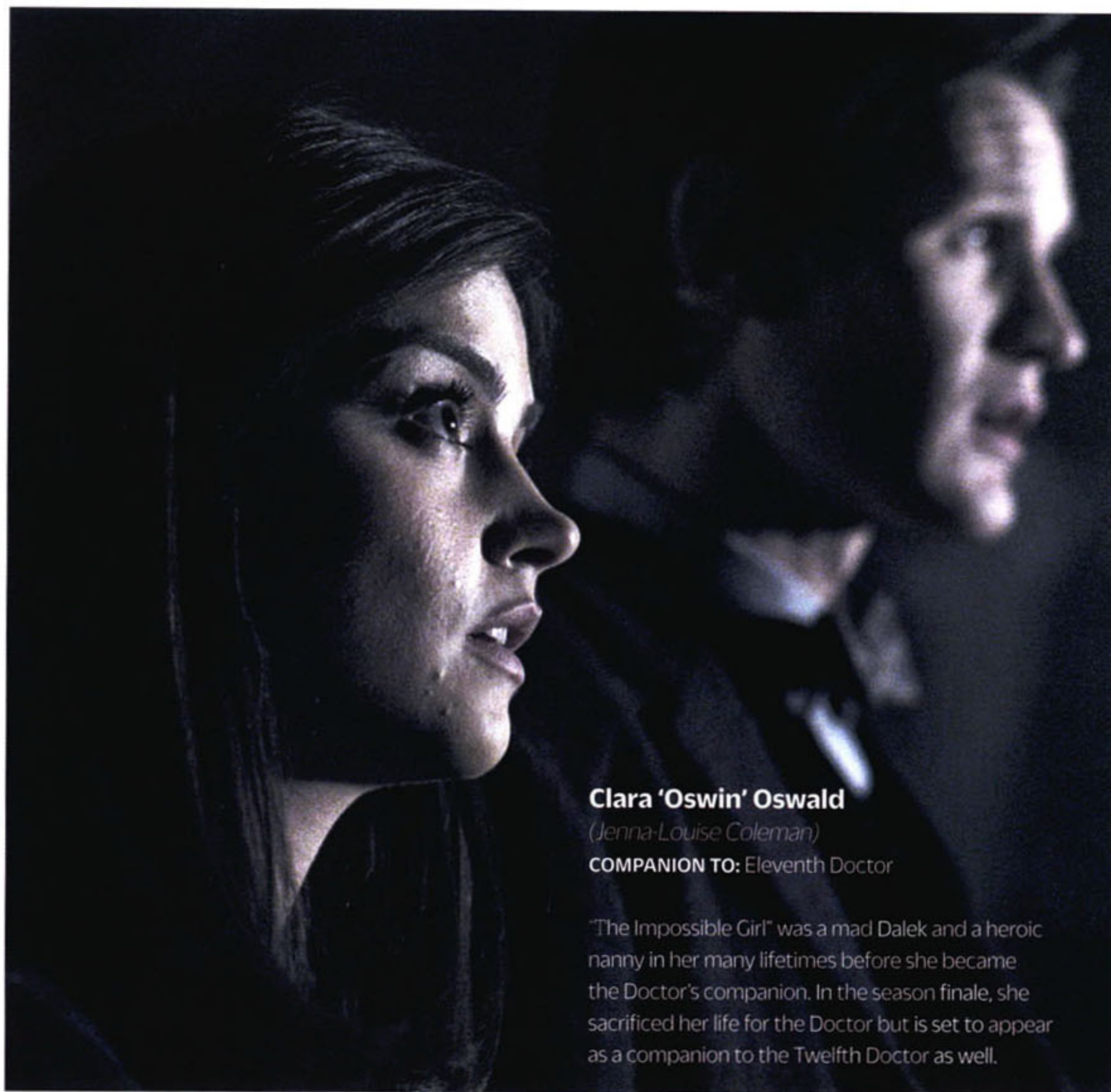
"The bigger it gets, the fewer excuses you have," Moffat says. "We're no longer that plucky British show that somehow broke through. It's an enormous franchise, and you really can't afford for the cracks to be showing."

"But at the same time," he continues, "the most creative aspects of 'Doctor Who' were born of financial necessity and production pragmatism. A spaceship that's bigger on the inside was a necessity for a show that couldn't afford to build a spaceship. Constantly switching lead actors by the most ingenious narrative means in recorded history was a pragmatic solution to a staffing problem. All of these things came about because of limitations."

And as for those fans, both Moffat and Davies profess to steering clear of message board commentary and online criticism, as the more hardcore elements of Whodom have hardly been deterred by the show's shift to a more general-interest model. "Certainly in the U.K. this is a very mainstream show, with an audience of 8 (million) to 9 million," notes Minchin, "though it can sometimes be very easy to take a very vocal 5,000 or 10,000 people as the voice of everyone."

Yet there's no disguising the fandom that continues to drive the show, even if keeping up with "Doctor Who's" expansive universe can sometimes stump the biggest experts in the building.

"Steven and I send each other emails all the time about continuity," Davies says. "Sometimes he'll send me the funniest emails at like 4 in the morning, saying, 'In episode 177, I forget, how did you say that engine worked?' I'll say, 'I don't know, Steven, I don't remember. Why don't you just make something up?'"



Clara 'Oswin' Oswald

(Jenna-Louise Coleman)

COMPANION TO: Eleventh Doctor

"The Impossible Girl" was a mad Dalek and a heroic nanny in her many lifetimes before she became the Doctor's companion. In the season finale, she sacrificed her life for the Doctor but is set to appear as a companion to the Twelfth Doctor as well.



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LONGTIME COMPANIONS

A look at the men and women who have traded their lives for a ride on the Tardis

By Erin Maxwell

WHAT IS THE DOCTOR without his faithful companion? That lucky man or woman who gets to travel with the Time Lord through time and space to battle bad guys, meet historical figures and sometimes crush on the Galifreyan. Companions are key to "Doctor Who" because they not only help the Doctor fight Cybermen and Daleks, but aid with finding his humanity, making it easier for auds to relate. They are his friends, his co-pilots, his assistants, the occasional bait for baddies and sometimes love interests. But for the most part, they help the audience understand the Doctor.

Over the years, the Doctor has had more than 50 companions, including a robotic dog. Here is a look at the longtime companions of the Doctor in the recent reboot: