

'Dr. Who' convention to preview stage version

By Robert Blau
Entertainment writer

Arts at large

Scenes from the planned first North American stage presentation based on the long-running "Dr. Who" television series will be previewed at 6 p.m. Saturday at the Hyatt Regency, 151 E. Wacker Dr.

Roger Mueller, the Chicago actor recently cast as "Dr. Who," the time-traveling alien, will read selections from "Dr. Who: The Inheritors of Time."

The reading will take place in conjunction with the third annual "Dr. Who" Convention, the largest gathering of its kind in the world, to be held at the Hyatt Friday and Saturday.

Also as part of the convention, John Ostrander, who wrote the stage adaptation, director William J. Norris, general manager John Economos and special effects designer Lee Ditkowski will discuss the making of the play at 5 p.m. Friday at the Hyatt Regency.

Ostrander, a Chicago actor and playwright, wrote the script after negotiating for the production rights from the British Broadcasting Company. The 22-year-old television series is now broadcast to 100 million viewers in more than 40 countries.

"After watching 'Dr. Who' on television one night," Ostrander says, "I took my felt hat to the bathroom and looked in the mirror and thought, I'd make a great doctor."

After giving up hopes of playing the part himself, Ostrander spent more than three years preparing the script.

Ostrander describes the character of "Dr. Who" as a "classic English eccentric who travels through space and time—from the dawn of time to the far-flung future.

"There are certain values inherent in the 'Dr. Who' character," Ostrander adds. "It's a sense that evil must be fought. That you can't sit back and watch."

Mueller, who will be appearing as Bob Cratchit in the Goodman Theatre's production of "A Christmas Carol," was chosen from among 300 actors competing for the role of "Dr. Who."

"Although an American actor will be playing the part, he will be playing the British persona. You don't want to dice around with that too much," Ostrander says.

In the British television series, whenever "Dr. Who" approaches death, he is able to regenerate into a new persona. According to the show, this can happen a total of 11 times. So far, six British actors have portrayed six different incarnations of the doctor.

Ostrander says his play will cover what happens after the supposedly last transformation of the doctor's persona, the 13th incarnation, so that it will not conflict with

any plans the British creators might have for the show.

"It's not only for the 'Dr. Who' fan," Ostrander says. "If you've never seen it before, you can come to the play and in 10 minutes you will have all the information you need. After that, sit back and have a good time going through time and space."

"Dr. Who: The Inheritors of Time" is scheduled to open May 14 at the Rickwick Theatre, 5 S. Prospect Ave., Park Ridge. Tickets will be available through Ticketmaster. For information about the convention and the play, call 565-1234, Friday or Saturday.

● The Atlantic Theater Company, a group of young theater artists founded in 1983, has announced plans to perform a series of vignettes by Shel Silverstein this winter.

The company, a group of 25 students who studied with playwright David Mamet when he taught at New York University, staged Silverstein's "Very, Very Serious Plays" as part of their residency at the Goodman Theatre last spring. Since their graduation from N.Y.U., the company has decided to settle in Chicago.

"Chicago is more supportive for young theater than New York because of the expenses and pressures there," says Mary McCann, artistic director.

McCann says the company is negotiating with the Chicago Actors Project, 2856 N. Halsted St., for performance space for the still

untitled Silverstein play. It will open, she expects, around mid-January. The company plans to stage original material this spring.

● Dates and theaters for the six participating foreign companies in next spring's Chicago International Theatre Festival have been set.

The National Theatre of Great Britain opens the festival April 28 at the Blackstone with John Webster's "The Duchess of Malfi." A double bill of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's "The Critic" and Tom Stoppard's "The Real Inspector Hound" enters the repertory at the Blackstone May 14.

Israel's Haifa Municipal Theatre will open its "Ghetto" April 29 and "The Soul of a Jew" May 7 in the Civic Theatre.

The Suzuki Company of Japan begins performances of "The Trojan Women" May 13 at the Civic.

El Tricicle of Spain will make its U.S. premiere April 29 at the Getz Theatre of Columbia College. Other Getz openings will see the Market Theatre of South Africa with "Asinamali" on May 5 and comedians Carlo and Alberto Colabalonì of Italy on May 20.

Tickets for the festival are now available to groups of 25 or more. For tickets, call 644-FEST.

● Actress Helen Hayes is to attend a private champagne brunch at the proposed site of the Chicago Theatre Center 11 a.m. Sunday at 2661 N. Halsted St. Hayes will dedicate the planned 500-seat theatre in memory of her late husband, playwright Charles MacArthur.