



The host of *Christmas* yet to come

A Christmas Carol gets a Time Lord twist – **Matt Smith** and **Katherine Jenkins** reveal how the festive *Doctor Who* came to life

ALTHOUGH AT 28, he's barely old enough to remember the original series, I suggest to Matt Smith that the *Doctor Who* Christmas Special is today's equivalent of *The Morecambe and Wise Show* – a holiday institution and mainstay of the Christmas schedules, based on brilliant writing that spreads bonhomie throughout the land better than anything bar the Baileys. "Yes indeed," concurs the 11th Doctor after a moment's contemplation. "In which case I'm Eric. Amy can be Ernie, the straight one who doesn't get the laughs!"

While one feels Matt Smith might pay for such temerity (though he takes pains to praise Karen Gillan's legs and contrast them with Little Ern's – "up to her ears – and beyond"), he, too, like a Morecambe and Wise guest star of yesteryear, has a long-felt want. In his case it was to appear in the Christmas Special. Ever since being promoted from television's chorus line to centre stage, Smith has been drooling at the possibility

"The Doctor just loves Christmas. It's everything about the human spirit that he likes, at its best"

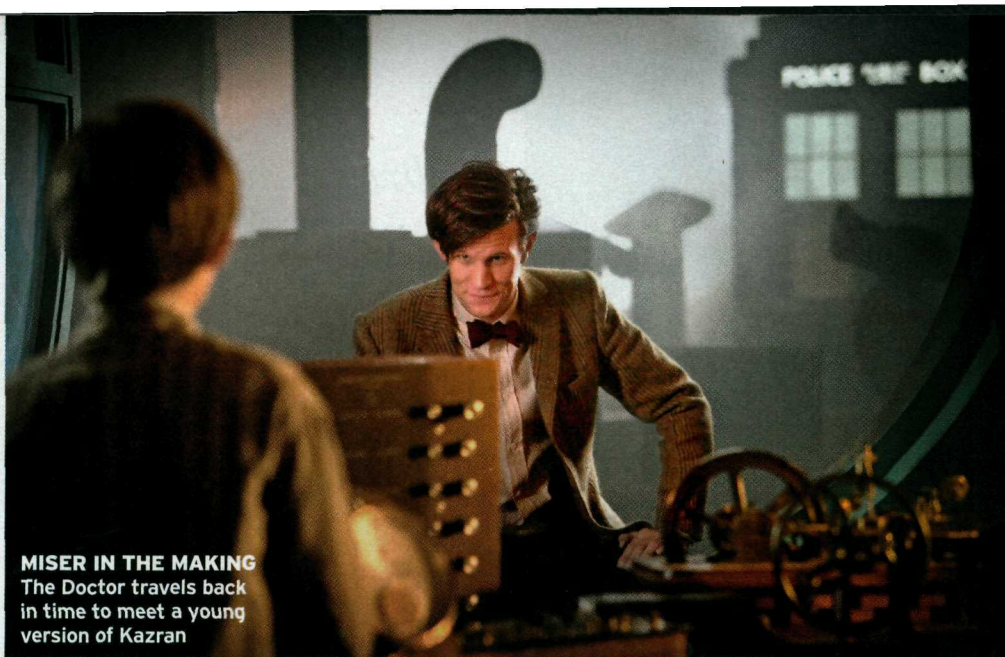
MATT SMITH

of appearing in this forthcoming episode, a sci-fi take on *A Christmas Carol*. And, it seems, he has not been disappointed with the reality.

"It was a great privilege to do it," he enthuses, aware of the institution the Christmas Special has become since it was launched with David Tennant in 2005. "It's something I've always wanted to do since I started the show. I love Christmas, plus I've always wanted to film something in July that has got snow in, *loads* of snow... it's very Christmassy."

Talking to Matt Smith, one senses there may not be many youngsters more excited than him on 25 December. Everything about *Doctor Who* appears to inspire in him an almost child-like wonder, from a discussion about the series' scariest monsters – "The Angels. I loved those >

LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY
The Doctor (Matt Smith) meets the Scrooge-like Kazran Sardick (Michael Gambon) and angel-voiced Abigail (Katherine Jenkins)



MISER IN THE MAKING
The Doctor travels back in time to meet a young version of Kazran

< episodes. I thought they cracked along" – to his musing about the Time Lord's signature dish of fish fingers and custard. "I wonder if Heston Blumenthal would be interested in that? He'd make something really dynamic. He's a clever guy, a real auteur."

Returning to the subject of the forthcoming episode, he concludes, "It's called the Christmas Special for a reason."

FOR KATHERINE JENKINS, whose last major dramatic outing was as Mary in the Nativity play at Alderman Davies Primary School in Neath, anticipation of the Christmas Special was mixed with huge trepidation. "It was far worse than any nerves I've ever had for any performance," recalls the mezzo unequivocally, a note of terror still audible in her voice.

"I spent a lot of time thinking about it," she adds. "It's such an iconic show, and it's one that we watch as a family. I just thought, 'I'd love to give it a try.' But I'm the first to say that I really don't consider myself an actress. So I asked if I could go in and read to them and I thought, 'Well, if I'm rubbish they won't give it to me, will they?' So I read to them and they called me on my 30th birthday and offered me the part."

And quite a part it is. People have assumed she has a minor role: "Either it's a cameo or I'm a Dalek!" The truth is rather different. "My character's called Abigail," she explains. "She's a young girl from a very humble background, a very poor family, and she's not very well. The town where she comes from is ruled by a sort of tyrant who's played by Michael Gambon. The rest is

MATT HOLYOAK

STAR IN THE WHONIVERSE
Mezzo-soprano Katherine Jenkins gets to show off her voice

"We've got one of the greatest writers in British TV"

MATT SMITH ON STEVEN MOFFAT

very difficult to explain in a few sentences, but really, for her, it's a love story."

Ah, Sir Michael. The only man to have played Albus Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* films and have a corner on the *Top Gear* racetrack named after him. How did she find working with him?

"He's obviously a legend," she answers with due deference. "The first day he was on set, Matt and I just followed him wherever he went. We just wanted to know everything. 'Tell us stories from Hollywood!' And we'd just sit there in amazement. Then there were the scenes we had together. One in particular, where it's quite intense and just the two of us – to be opposite him and to be watching him, I couldn't believe his power. He moved me so much."

For Smith, meanwhile, the episode provided further proof of head writer Steven Moffat's increasing confidence.

"You think it's going to be about one thing," he explains, "and then Steven's rather brilliant mind takes it somewhere completely different. He fascinates me. He's moved it into this mad, fairytale world. Let's not forget, he wrote six *Doctor Whos* and a *Sherlock* last year and oversaw every other *Sherlock* and every other *Doctor Who*. The man doesn't stop. He texted me yesterday saying, 'I'm in Greece in a darkened room writing episodes

one and two of the new series.' We've got one of the greatest writers in British TV."

Perhaps so, but Smith himself displays an incisive understanding of why Christmas and *Doctor Who* go together so well.

"The spirit of the Doctor and the spirit of Christmas are entwined somewhere," he reasons. "He just loves it because it's everything about the human spirit that he likes, at its best. And it's intriguing to him because it's something that he is never going to be fully part of in the same way as humans."

HE'S ALSO HUGE appreciative of the extra dimension Katherine Jenkins's voice brings to proceedings.

"Boy, can she sing!" he marvels. "It is like silk. It's like watching Stevie Wonder or someone where you go, 'You know what, I can't see the nuts and the bolts.' It looks effortless."

While stopping short of recommending he take up singing full time, Jenkins was appreciative in turn of Smith's on-set vocal contributions.

"Matt's got a really good bass voice," she laughs. "We did threaten to do a duet at one point, but we never quite got round to it."

"I used to sing in between takes," Smith adds, slipping into a lower register. "I'd sing very low, just to take the mickey a little bit. Sadly they didn't use me in the takes. The fools!"

Perhaps *Doctor Who*'s producers know best. An unwanted comparison with Morecambe and Wise springs to mind – Eric's classic riposte to André "Preview" Previn's criticism of his musicianship: "I'm playing all the right notes – but not necessarily in the right order." John Naughton

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