

**Doctor Who**Saturday 6.05pm **BBC1, BBC HD**

"Sexy? The Doctor's a bit bumbly, isn't he? He doesn't really know what to do with women"

In just 13 weeks **Matt Smith** has made us forget all about David Tennant. How did he do it and what's next for Saturday night's boy wonder?

# Matt stoops to conquer

HE SAVES THE known universe on a weekly basis, does quantum physics in his head and looks damn good with his shirt off. He also runs rings around Earthlings on the football pitch. As *Doctor Who* fans settle in for this series' big finale, it's safe to say that the 11th Doctor has made an impact.

"I hope so," says Matt Smith. He sounds guardedly pleased, like a politician waiting for the final count before the balloons go up. Even without the tweeds and bow-tie, there's a pleasantly fogeyish side to Smith. Perhaps he's the only person in the country who hasn't heard the rave reviews or listened to the online mutterings (drowned out, it should be said, by virtual wolf whistles) about the unseemly sexiness of bared torsos at teatime.

"Sexy?" says Smith, as if trying out a new word for a bafflingly alien concept. "Do you think he's sexy? The Doctor's a bit bumbly, isn't he? He doesn't really know what to do with women." When it's pointed out that in the matter of female desire, bumbliness has a long and distinguished history, Smith nods respectfully, like someone who has a lot to learn.

In street clothes – an indie-funk ensemble of baggy-necked T-shirt, jeans and folded-back biker boots – the 27-year-old looks a lot younger than his screen persona. The rise from virtual unknown to top of the hot list has, he admits, been "a steep curve" (vertical lift-off is nearer the mark). "I've never got away with being the handsome leading man," he points out. "I suppose I'm the peculiar, odd lead. Which," he allows doubtfully, "may work in my favour."

On the whole Smith seems to regard instant fame rather as a gourmet might view instant custard – slightly too good to be true, but surprisingly delicious. "Being recognised in the streets is a new experience for me, but it's certainly not a bad experience." Come triumph or disaster, he is resolved, in Kipling's phrase, to "treat those two impostors just the same".

"I'm guessing," he says, "the trick with being in the eye of the media is to ignore the bad publicity – and perhaps even the things that are good – because, artistically, each is as dangerous as the other."

"There's no doubt that when you're on screen every week, people look at you differently and you just have to adapt to that, the way you'd adapt, say, if your hair turned white overnight. A lot depends on the context of your life – maybe if you've grown up with a family who were famous or something, you'd have a different perspective, but for me it's a totally new thing, and I try to adapt as intelligently as I can."

Could the mention of famous parents be an allusion to Smith's feverishly reported relationship with British model Daisy Lowe, the 21-year-old daughter of singer/fashion designer Pearl Lowe and musician Gavin Rossdale? (Daisy ▽



and the Doctor were snapped adapting enthusiastically to each other's perspective at the Coachella music festival in California back in April.) If it is, Smith's not saying. "I'll politely decline to comment, if that's OK," he says – and the politeness is genuine. "That's a section of my life I'd rather not talk about."

**H**E'S HAPPIER DISCUSSING the Doctor, although even here, there's a careful objectivity – a civil shrugging off of credit. "People ask me, 'Who do you think your Doctor is?' and I'm reluctant to think of it in those terms, because it's still a work in progress. Steven Moffat, who's just the most brilliant writer – told me when I first met him that the interesting thing, the defining thing, about the Doctor is that he never quite knows what's going to come out of his mouth in any given situation. His thoughts just combust spontaneously. I've tried to harness that brain-to-mouth rapidity."

"I mean, you could think about it for ever, but how do you play the most charismatic man in the universe? It's a real challenge. If you play him consciously charismatic, he instantly loses the charisma. Of course, really charismatic people don't have to do a thing. They just are. I'm still finding my way on that one, but I like to think it gives me something creative to play with."

Certainly, Moffat's scripts present a less cocksure character than previous incarnations, a Doctor who is more seeker than cosmic fixer. "I'd like that to be true," says Smith. "Hopefully, we see him in the white heat of danger, flying by the seat of his pants. He's also funny and he has great courage and this enormous intellect, but all the great Doctors have had that. As a character, he kind of 'belongs' to everyone. Everyone has their own identity for him. Mine is probably different, but I've become a real fan. I know it sounds very vain, but I do look forward to the ceremony of watching the show on a Saturday night."

The cubic tonnes of fan mail pouring in for Smith is, surely, the best validation of "his" Doctor, though it may give some of his steamier correspondents pause to learn that all letters are opened by the actor's mum. "She quite enjoys it," he says, "and we're both quite keen to make sure that we get back to people." All the same, sifting

## THE CRITICS' VERDICT

"He's quirky without being irritating; he's likeable, witty and bursting with joie de vivre"

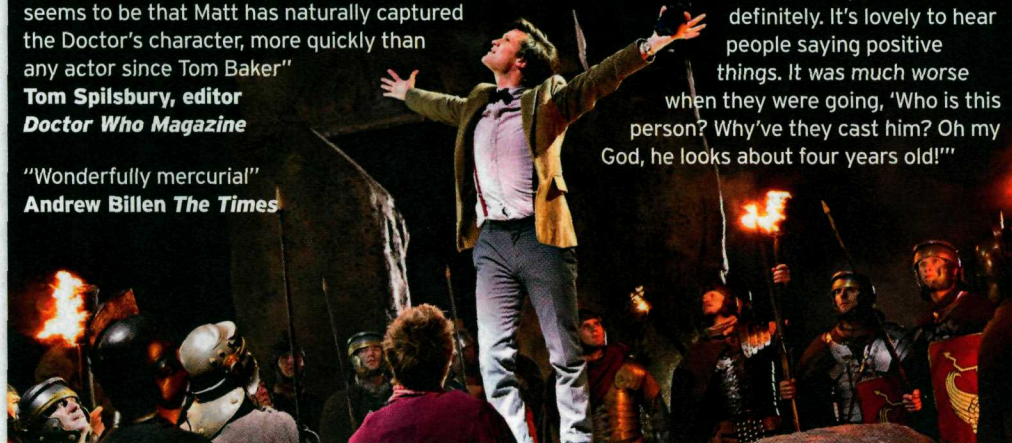
**Alison Graham** *Radio Times*

"I was genuinely expecting a backlash, simply because David Tennant had been so popular. But I've been astounded by how well Matt has been accepted as the Doctor, particularly by DWM's readers. The overwhelming response seems to be that Matt has naturally captured the Doctor's character, more quickly than any actor since Tom Baker"

**Tom Spilsbury**, editor  
*Doctor Who Magazine*

"Wonderfully mercurial"

**Andrew Billen** *The Times*



through sacks of love-letters to a suddenly famous son must, one imagines, raise complicated feelings in the maternal bosom? "Oh, it's not so much the girls," says Smith. "It's more the 50-year-old men from New Zealand who live and breathe *Doctor Who* – they're the real puzzlers."

For his own part, he's bemused by the furore sparked by the recent episode *The Lodger* where the Doctor was barely covered by a towel. "Apparently, there are people out there freeze-framing the shots. Cheeky monkeys, aren't they? Though, I'm assured my modesty remained intact throughout."

Stripping off is not a big issue for Smith. "I've just been playing Christopher Isherwood in a film, where I spend half my time in the nude. I believe sometimes, as an actor, you have to make yourself vulnerable – you have to go to places where you think, 'Oh, I don't want to do that.' It doesn't help when you have all these huge sparks [electricians] standing around the set laughing."

On BBC2 this autumn, *Christopher and his*

"He leaps like a stag, his speech is set to fast-forward and his face seems to open like an accordion, as the tumbling forelock and long chin take off in different directions. Even allowing that the world is going to end in 20 minutes, you do feel he could simmer down a bit"

**Nancy Banks Smith** *The Guardian*

**Matt on Matt** "I think my strongest episodes are in the second half of the series. In terms of consistency as well. Yes, definitely. It's lovely to hear people saying positive things. It was much worse when they were going, 'Who is this person? Why've they cast him? Oh my God, he looks about four years old!'"

*Kind*, co-starring Lindsay Duncan and Toby Jones, charts author Isherwood's induction, by WH Auden, into the gay underworld of 1930s Berlin – a confident choice of role for an actor on the cusp of a big career. "I did think about it, playing a gay role, and I know a lot of people around me thought about it. But you know, it's about stretching your own identity as an actor and stretching other people's imagination about what you can do."

**S**EX SCENES WITH former Bond girl Eva Green in *Womb* (a sci-fi movie shot last year, as yet unreleased here) he embraced with equal enthusiasm. "Oh, it was very difficult, obviously, having to kiss Eva all the time," laughs Smith. "I learned a lot about control from working with her, because Eva, as an actor, is very still and I tend to be very kinetic. Eva has real style and I have the most immense respect for her."

Having, as it were, got his hand in with a Bond girl, would he fancy a crack at 007 himself? "I don't think I'm handsome enough," says Smith, cheerfully. "I think I'd make quite a good, young Bond villain. It would be kind of nice, though," he admits, "to be the actor who's done both..."

Offers of new work, it's to be assumed, are not lacking, but if Smith has designs on Hollywood, or any kind of five-year plan, he's keeping them to himself. "I'll shoot the next series of *Who* and then take it from there," he says.

And anyway, surely the Doctor's way cooler than James Bond – he's funnier, for a start, he's a time traveller and he's 907 years old! "Come on," says Smith, allowing himself the briefest flash of glad, unguarded triumph. "It doesn't get better than this!"

➤ For more pics of Matt Smith as the Doctor, a weekly blog and an episode guide, visit [radiotimes.com/doctor-who](http://radiotimes.com/doctor-who)

### WHAT MATT DID NEXT

Far left: stepping out with Daisy Lowe in Palm Springs in April.

Left: savouring the homosexual demi-monde of 1930s Berlin in *Christopher and His Kind*. Below: with ex-Bond girl Eva Green in the movie *Womb*

