Fans who are in the know crowd store to see ‘Doctor’

by Gordon Walek

It’s one of those late winter days in Chicago when the snow is gone, the ground is brown and the windy wind is out of the north. I was skiing on an old road near the city, without too much attention. However, Davison probably best known to American television audiences as the Doctor on the PBS series "All Creatures Great and Small," is the key reason for the interest outside. They could care less about "All Creatures" They want to see "Doctor Who"

Two years ago, Davison replaced the erstwhile Tom Baker as the third Doctor to portray "Doctor Who." In the 20-year-old British Broadcasting Corp. science-fiction television series, Chicago's WTTW Channel 11 has carried the show since 1975. After playing a good-natured character, the actor returned to the role of the character of Doctor Who in the show.

Black then not many Chicagoans had heard of Doctor Who, but in the 1970s, Tom Baker in the leading role of the program of an actor who could make a science-fiction audience. WTTW estimates 250,000 viewers tuned into the show at 11 p.m. on Sunday, even for reruns.

No matter that on the day of the "Doctor Who" fans who had sat through Tom Baker reruns had any idea of when or where they might see the Doctor. That has been changed with the gentleness Davison Channel 11: after all, already had paid for the rights to another 18 months of Tom Baker reruns, even though the BBC was making the new Doctor Who episodes available for American distribution it was not known when they might air in Chicago, or whether WTTW would show the last few episodes.

No matter that Davison II and his lovely wife Sandra were delayed in making their appearance at The New Fantasy Shop. No matter that cold, cold was blowing into the faces of everyone waiting in that line. These folks were ready for the new Doctor Who.

Most British luminaries and Davison who stars in two other comedy series in Britain in addition to his Doctor Who characters are in costume — at least in costume when they are beating the drum for their shows. They usually don't make appearances at places like The New Fantasy Shop on West Belmont Avenue.

But there Davison was his wife beside him sitting in the back room of a store that was furnished in contemporary style: a cozy living room where the residents are seen smiling as they watch television. Some jotted this:

"Davison in fact was on a vacation, his bloody vacation, for God's sake. He stepped at the store only at the urging of wife George Breck.

Breck might be described as your ultimate Doctor Who fan, and for good reason. He makes money by selling Doctor Who paraphernalia which is available in abundance at his store. He negotiated with Davison's agent for more than a year to get the doctor here, and this holiday was his reward.

BUT MORE about Breck later. Davison is the man of the hour. That he was chosen to play the good doctor by executive producer John Nathan-Turner makes sense. He has watched the show since he was 12.

It was a very extraordinary idea for me when they suggested it to me, Davison said. I have played many roles in "All Creatures," his tweeds and saddle shoes are as well liked in "Doctor Who" as his long coat and cravat are.

It terrified me but it is not an opportunity you turn down because it terrifies you. A great part of the show's popularity is the change of characters and actors has been so natural that I have never had to be concerned it to go on for 20 years. It couldn't have done that with just one actor. But the show

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answer WTTW telephones on Sunday nights during the fund-raising drives.

Bowman fired off a response, denying most of the allegations, but that did little to lessen the outcry.

“The thing that bothered most of us fans,” Breo said, “is that Channel 11 was very noncommittal about everything. They said they were negotiating but didn’t say when things would cement. I think basically the only reason they did decide to buy them was because of the action of the fans.”

A LOT OF “Doctor Who” fans called the station to complain, charging WTTW could have obtained the episodes a long time ago.

Breo acknowledges that assertion was inaccurate because the company that syndicates the series was releasing it in America on a market-by-market basis and wasn’t ready to negotiate with Chicago until March 1.

Not surprisingly, the price for the new “Dr. Who” segments was considerably more than the Baker episodes because of the show’s increased popularity. But before the end of the month, Channel 11 had come to terms with the syndicator, and the Davison series was ready to roll.

Turner agreed that “Doctor Who” had evolved into a hit for his station, although he said it is not the blockbuster some of the fans say it is. The program draws fewer viewers than “Sneak Previews” and less than half of the audience that tunes in for, say, National Geographic specials.

THE FIRST Davison episode aired on April 24 and will continue on Sundays through June 13, when the station will rerun some old shows starring Jon Pertwee as “Doctor Who.” The Pertwee shows will conclude in September and be followed by Tom Baker reruns through July 1984, when a new set of Davison episodes will be available.

All’s well that ends well, the saying goes. But some “Dr. Who” fans aren’t so sure Breo, just back from England where he was working out a merchandising agreement with the BBC for “Doctor Who” items (“we’re keeping a hand on the fan pulse”), is pleased the new shows are available, but he isn’t sure the hard feelings have been smoothed.

Fan club members will be back at WTTW for the next pledge period, if they are welcome, he said.

“I may be talking through my hat because they may be very happy to have our support,” he said. “But there may be a few ill feelings down there.”