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Tom Baker of PBS-TV's "Dr. Who" series

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FREE
Exclusive Happenings Interview

By Will LaDuke &
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"Beware of actors...they are such treacherous people,"
claims Tom Baker, former star
of "Doctor Who," Britain's
longest running science fiction
program. (Editors note: "Doctor
Who" can be seen on WMVS-TV
Channel 10, Friday nights at
10:30 and is repeated the
following Saturday at 2:00pm).

Having made that point clear,
Baker then flashes one of his
now trademark Harpo Marx
grins and relates on how he
decided to become an actor.
"I was about seven or eight,"
Baker says reminiscing, "and I
was intensely religious in those
days. I was what the English
call a professional mourner. At
one particular funeral I was so
cold and hungry that I began to
cry. After the services were
over, I was taken aside by a
member of the funeral party and
given two shillings—about ten
times the amount normally
given. That began my
corruption!"

In Baker's case, it was a
corruption which took some time
in developing. As he puts it,
"My life just happens to be full
of pleasant accidents."

One break came when he
became—for a short while—
a protege of Sir Laurence
Olivier. Baker cherishes fond
memories of that particular
phase of his life.

"I think quite a lot of him. He
used to make me laugh a lot,
and he invited me to ALL his
parties."

It was through Olivier that
Baker was able to land the
choice role of the mad monk
Rasputin in "Nicholas and
Alexandra." It was a big break,
but looking back, Baker is
whimsical about the film.

"Ironically, the film didn't
really do anything for me at
all. Something of a disaster
as it turned out."

One role that DID do
something for Baker's career
was that of the villain in "The Golden
Voyage of Sinbad." It was
because of his sympathetic
portrayal of the character that
"Doctor Who" producer Barry
Letts decided to cast Baker
in the role of the Doctor.

"Suddenly," Baker recalls,
"my whole life changed. I went
from carrying bricks at a
building site to playing "Doctor
Who!"

For seven years, from 1974
to 1981, Baker was the Doctor
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tenure with the show, Baker

departure from the show so
shrouded in mystery? Was his
parting from "Doctor Who"
less than amicable?

"I don't think so," he answers
firmly. "There was no sort of
animosity at all. I just felt that
I had done enough, and that it
was time for me to get out and
try to capitalize on its popularity."

Why then, won't Baker be
appearing in the show's 20th
anniversary episode?

Baker pauses, formulating his
response carefully. "I don't want
to seem immodest, but I wasn't
so much asked as I was implorled to do the
show! It wasn't easy for me to say no. I didn't want to get
cought up in something that
had already taken up so much
of my life."

Seven years in a particular
role has been known to tarnish
many an actor's performance.
In the case of Tom Baker and
"Doctor Who," this wasn't
necessarily so. "I just sort of
stumbled through it, he says.
"I drew up a list of things I
believed the character wouldn't
do, and sort of moved on to the
next serial. When I was doing
"Doctor Who," I was usually
filming five or six scripts at
the same time. We were constantly
fighting the clock and, quite
happily as it turned out...I didn't
ever know what was going on
with the show."

How does Baker compare
fans of the show in England
to fans here in the U.S.?
"I think American fans are much more
open, more demonstrative.
"Whereas the British fans are
much more reticent, far more
reserved."

And what of the recognition
factor? Is Baker put out at being
recognized on the street?

"The other day, I attended
a China exhibition at one of your
museums," he told us. "And I
was looking at some marvelous
Ming Dynasty artifacts, when
I turned to see three elderly
women. And suddenly, there
was a flash of recognition, and
they started to give me a
standing ovation!" Baker
laughs as he relates the tale.

"I was really quite touched
and amused by it. And I thought
silently to myself—that could
only happen here in America."

Tom Baker (Dr. Who) and his assistant Romana Land (Lalla Ward) in a scene from an episode entitled "State of Decay."

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comments: "I liked being on the
show a great deal. It was a great
pleasure going in and trying to
work your alchemy on quite
ordinary scripts. It struck me
as being a jolly way to pass the
day. The days ran into months
and the months ran into years.
It was—i think—the happiest
time of my entire life."

Why then was Baker's