

'WHO' REDO RATES IN THE STATES

BBC America benefits from first U.S. window

By SAM THIELMAN

Who continues to grab ratings wherever he goes? You betcha.

After four seasons airing in the States first on SyFy and then months later on BBC America, venerable sci-fi/fantasy show "Doctor Who" has moved over entirely to the Beeb's tiny U.S. network, where it has become one of the net's top-rated shows.

But now, series rejuvenator Russell T. Davies is leaving the show, and Steven Moffat, who penned memorable "Who" episodes during Davies' run, is stepping into one of the most coveted jobs in British TV. His reimagining of "Who" is important to the legacy of the long-running series, but also to BBC America, which is looking to stake its claim as the U.S. destination for British science fiction.

Though the current version of "Who" began in 2005, the program has been on and off the air since 1963, when William Hartnell origi-

nated the famous role. Moffat's revamped version will premiere April 3 on BBC1 in the U.K., with an April 17 airdate on BBC America — and now that the net has the first U.S. window, it's treating the Moffat incarnation like a whole new show.

"It's really important for us to have that first window," says BBCA programming principal Richard De Croce. "And it's great to have it on one of the BBC superbrands."

BBC America had previously aired first windows of adult-centric "Who" spinoff "Torchwood" and related kids' show "The Sarah Jane Adventures" — both created as a result of Davies' runaway success with the flagship series in the U.K. But for four years, the net had to run "Doctor Who" months behind its Syfy premiere.

Besides its own spinoffs, "Who" has also inadvertently helped to create a new wave of British sci-fi and fantasy series, including the



MOFFAT



DE CROCE



Matt Smith steps into the iconic British role of "Doctor Who," as the reinvented sci-fi/fantasy series, now under the guidance of Steven Moffat, prepares to bow next month. Episodes will air Stateside on BBC America.

BBC's own comedy/horror series "Being Human" and ITV's "Primeval" (which airs opposite "Who" in the U.K.). "Human" is getting an American incarnation on Syfy, and Akiva Goldsman and Kerry Foster are set to produce a bigscreen version of "Primeval."

Suddenly, the Doctor's handlers are competing with the fruits of his success.

"I think we have a lot to do

with why the show's popular in the U.S.," De Croce says. "We've done a lot to promote the specials, and the new series is going to be top priority for the channel."

That means producing U.S.-only content for the show, and De Croce says fans will see a lot more of that. Lots of Web content, for one thing, and new ways of preventing nerddom's first resource for hard-to-catch

shows — piracy — from compromising the net's bottom line. "That's one reason that we try not to have too much of a lag between the U.K. airdate and the U.S. airdate," De Croce says. The episodes also become available on iTunes in the U.S. after they've aired on BBCA.

So how will Moffat's series be different from Davies'? "Everyone always asks that and I

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Germany debates the value of news

By ERIK KIRSCHBAUM

BERLIN With the economy still struggling, German commercial webs — like their counterparts in the U.K. and elsewhere — are wrestling with the cost of producing news and current affairs shows.

Thomas Ebeling, CEO of pan-European broadcasting group ProSiebenSat.1, got himself into hot water when he suggested cutting news budgets to save costs, saying that it's politicians rather than viewers who care about coverage.

Ebeling, a pharmaceuticals exec until taking over the TV group a year ago, has run into fierce opposition from media regulators, political leaders and journalists for his proposal to ditch the group's loss-making N24 news channel and cut ProSiebenSat.1's €65 million (\$89 mil-

lion) news budget by about a third.

They dismiss his view that TV must make money like any other business, and argue that broadcasting is a cultural asset, with a lofty status and its own set of rules.

Ebeling's comments have triggered a broader discussion about whether regulators should draft more detailed news content rules for commercial broadcasters in Germany, a country that requires webs to include news and information as a reaction to its Nazi past.

Deep-pocketed pubcasters ARD and ZDF are the dominant news sources, both airing two flagship newscasts seven days a week in primetime. They are publicly funded and can afford the pricey content.

Commercial webs RTL, Sat.1 and ProSieben also have invested considerably in news, but only RTL has managed to win ratings — and standing — on a par with the pubcasters. Unlike other commercial webs RTL doesn't interrupt its 25-minute nightly news broadcasts with advertisements.



**ProSiebenSat.1
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Because of the daily deluge of commercial-free news coverage, the public is remarkably well-informed about government policies and what their elected leaders are doing.

But younger auds are less interested — which makes news a high-cost, low-return target for cost-cutting managers like Ebeling, who oversees 26 free TV and 24 pay-TV channels in Europe, all struggling with falling advertising revenues.

Ebeling, also facing a mountain of debt from ProSiebenSat.1's 2007 acquisition of SBS Broadcasting, freely admits he watches the news on ARD and ZDF, saying, "I pay the viewer fees, too."

But he doesn't believe that commercial orgs should support money-losing content.

Speaking at a conference in Berlin this month organized by Germany's DLM media regulatory commission, Ebeling said, "News is an add-on. Should we have €20 million losses per year for that or €40 million? How much should we have to lose?"

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ProSiebenSat.1
CEO Thomas
Ebeling faces
a battle to cut
news spending.



Top primetime shows of the week

(March 8-14, 2010)

Rank	Skein (Net)	Adults 18-49 rating/share	Overall aud in millions
1.	American Idol-Tue. (Fox)	8.2/23	22.75
2.	American Idol-Wed. (Fox)	7.5/20	20.70
3.	American Idol-Thu. (Fox)	6.3/19	19.34
4.	The Big Bang Theory (CBS)	5.9/15	16.32
5.	Two and a Half Men (CBS)	5.8/15	17.61
6.	House (Fox)	4.8/13	12.81
7.	Lost (ABC)	4.2/11	9.49
8.	Grey's Anatomy (ABC)	3.9/11	10.94
8.	How I Met Your Mother (CBS)	3.9/11	10.06
8.	Undercover Boss (CBS)	3.9/10	13.51
11.	NCIS (CBS)	3.8/11	19.58
11.	The Office (NBC)	3.8/11	7.43
11.	Modern Family (ABC)	3.8/10	9.02
14.	Desperate Housewives (ABC)	3.7/09	12.01
15.	Survivor (CBS)	3.6/11	12.12
15.	Rules of Engagement (CBS)	3.6/09	10.07
17.	NCIS: Los Angeles (CBS)	3.5/09	16.99
17.	Family Guy (Fox)	3.5/09	6.66
19.	The Mentalist (CBS)	3.4/10	16.02
19.	Criminal Minds (CBS)	3.4/09	13.29
21.	CSI: Miami (CBS)	3.3/10	11.93
21.	CSI (CBS)	3.3/09	15.25
23.	Celebrity Apprentice (NBC)	3.2/08	8.27
24.	The Amazing Race (CBS)	3.0/09	10.10
24.	The Biggest Loser (NBC)	3.0/08	7.91
24.	Kitchen Nightmares (Fox)	3.0/08	7.19

Top primetime networks

Net	Adults 18-49*	Net	Total viewers*
Fox	4.51	CBS	11.26
CBS	3.65	Fox	9.40
NBC	2.73	ABC	6.48
ABC	2.70	NBC	6.30
Univision	1.61	Univision	3.24
USA	1.10	Disney	2.50
TBS	1.09	USA	2.48
CW	1.01	Fox News	2.25

*in millions

Top syndicated shows

(March 1-7, 2010)

	2+ aud in millions	18-49 rating
1. Wheel of Fortune	11.83	1.9
2. Jeopardy	9.88	1.6
3. Two and a Half Men	8.62	2.7
4. Judge Judy	6.73	1.5
5. Entertainment Tonight	6.47	1.5

Source: Nielsen

Each ratings point represents roughly 1.32 million viewers 18-49

LOWRY

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extended five-month layoff put any kind of hitch in Woods' swing. As a bonus, the tournament will be called by CBS' Jim Nantz, uniting the story's recurring themes — inasmuch as Nantz traditionally discusses the Augusta course in hushed, reverent tones that suggest he's about to have an orgasm.

DRAMA: Woods can simultaneously be cast as the hero — competing like a champion, potentially, despite the media glare, pressure and distractions — and the villain. Will he triumph over adversity? Frankly, if NBC execs received a pitch this compelling, they'd give it a 13-episode commitment on the spot.

SOAP OPERA: The elements here are obvious but irresistible: Can Woods' marriage be saved? What will his wife Elin do? Will she be in the gallery? And if so, can we fit a camera inside her glasses or up her nose?

COMEDY: Latenight hosts will have a field day with Woods being back in action, but many of the biggest laughs will likely be unintended.

Inevitably, news and sports commenta-

tors' lazy use of language — especially golf and general sports terminology like "swing," "putts," "perform," "hole" and "wood" — will provide wonderful fodder for YouTube and eagle-eyed websites, along with more conventional satirists.

REALITY TV: If E!, VH1, A&E or Bravo don't announce a reality show featuring one or more of Woods' mistresses before Memorial Day, that will qualify as a major upset. And expect Dr. Drew Pinsky to find at least one athlete for his next edition of "Sex Rehab."

Finally, every aspect of "The Tiger Woods Show" will almost surely share a painful lack of self-awareness. The story will be exploited from every conceivable angle, dragging the participants through the muckiest of sand traps and elevating the stakes to preposterous levels — all while maintaining a chilly "Oh Tiger, how could you?" sense of indignation, as if the media isn't positively giddy about its front-row seat.

All told, the showcase sounds like a can't-miss hit. It's only too bad the networks can't find a way to bottle it — and that the Masters isn't being played during a sweeps month.

DOCTOR

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never know what to say," Moffat says ruefully. "The phrase we keep using is 'dark fairy tales' and it's maybe a bit strange. Since Dr. Who came back, there are now a lot of competing fantasy series, and we have to stay ahead of the curve."

For his part, Moffat says the priority for the all-new, all-different "Doctor Who" will be to make the show as accessible as possible. "People don't like to think they're watching a ruddy sequel," Moffat observes. "They like to think they're watching a first episode. It's important to cater to the casual viewer, and to keep the show accessible and have sort of a lighter arc throughout the series."

That balance, Moffat says, is a delicate one; Davies was bullish on multipart stories and recurring characters. "You don't want to say, 'I've got a 42-year-plan and it'll be good fun in 16 years time,'" Moffat cautions. "It's got to be fun now."

Bestselling author Neil Gaiman, who is set to pen an upcoming seg of the show and is an avowed fan, thinks that Moffat, who left a high-profile gig writing Steven Spielberg's "Tintin" movies for "Who," is suited to the job. "Steve Moffat wrote six of the 10 best episodes of the last 10 years," Gaiman says flatly. "And he wrote 'Blink,' which may be said to be the best episode in the series." The episode Gaiman references won two BAFTAs and the sci-fi community's prestigious Hugo Award.

The latest actor to play the Doctor, Matt Smith, probably



"The Sarah Jane Adventures," left, and "Torchwood," below, are recent spinoffs of long-running Brit hit "Doctor Who."



describes the whacked-out sci-fi/fantasy skein best. "You're not bound by the laws of time or logic or space or drama," he says. "You can show up in New York and get into the first cab you come across and the cab driver can turn into a giant pink elephant called Clive and you're off!"

The 26-year-old Smith isn't a stranger to TV — he starred in BBC adaptations of "Golden Compass" novelist Philip Pullman's "The Ruby in the Smoke" and "The Shadow in the North," among others — but this is by far his biggest role. The part of the Doctor carries some instant celebrity with it, and Smith says the audition process was as cloak-and-dagger as the show itself. "There was a lot of secrecy," he says. "You had to sign into hotels under different names, and of course you could tell no one about it."

Smith represents Moffat's biggest challenge: The writer/helmer is bullish on the young thesp — fiercely so, even — but Smith will be stepping into

the shoes of David Tennant, an actor whose turn as the Doctor was critically lauded almost as loudly as his "Hamlet" on the West End. For five years, Tennant offered the show real star power, and it's inevitable that some of it will leave with him.

In the U.S., "Who" fandom is notable more for its enthusiasm than its size, but the audience is clearly growing. The finale of the Davies run on BBC America was the net's first telecast ever to surpass 1 million viewers, and the net obviously hopes Moffat's tenure on the show will mean more of the same.

But Moffat says change is definitely coming. "It really is not me just taking over from Russell," he cautions. "It's always quite out-there, but now we have a license to go even wilder and bigger."