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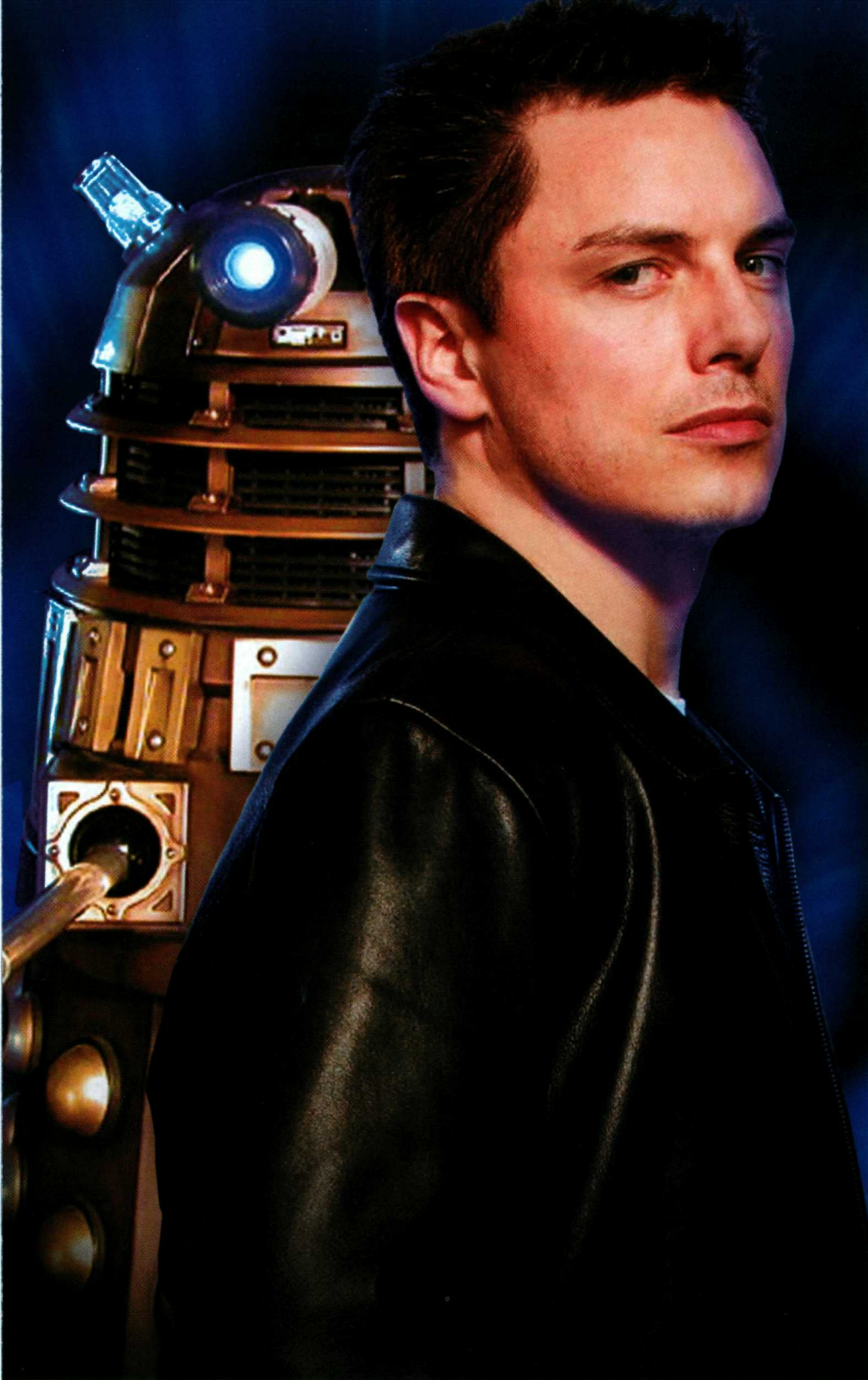


out northwest

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

JOHN BARROWMAN

NEWS ★ COMMUNITY ★ LIFESTYLE ★ CULTURE



JACK OF ALL TRADES

outnorthwest talks to JOHN BARROWMAN

THE TERM 'ALL-ROUNDER' WAS INVENTED FOR JOHN BARROWMAN. OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS WE'VE SEEN HIM TRY HIS HAND (SUCCESSFULLY) AT EVERYTHING FROM PRESENTING CHILDREN'S TELEVISION - REMEMBER *LIVE & KICKING?* TO ACTING IN GLOSSY AMERICAN SOAPS (*CENTRAL PARK WEST*). MOST RECENTLY HE'S WOWED US IN *DANCING ON ICE* AND, OF COURSE, HAD OUR EYELIDS FLUTTERING AS THE SO-HANDSOME-IT-HURTS CAPTAIN JACK, IN THE REVIVAL OF *DOCTOR WHO*.

It doesn't stop there. Oh no. How about a musical career that many a would-be pop idol might kill for? Check. A stage resume that covers every classic West End musical you can think of? Tick! Big budget Hollywood movie? Oh, go on then. How about having a whole series written for you by television's hottest writer? Well, it'd be rude not to.

For the uninitiated, you'd expect that *outnorthwest* is sitting in this lovely little restaurant in London expecting to meet some grand old dame of the theatre, perhaps in his late 70's? You'd be in for a pleasant surprise then. John Barrowman is 38, drop dead gorgeous and the gay man we'd ALL love to be. All this, and he's bloody lovely too!

Despite the American accent, Barrowman is a Scot, born and bred. "I'm originally from Glasgow, and left there in 1976 when I was 8 years old," he tells us. "It was my Dad's company that moved us to the States, and he ended up being Vice President of the Caterpillar Tractor Company, which is a good thing because all the gay boys wear their boots and clothes! I grew up in the Mid-West. It wasn't really a culture shock for me because I was so young."

While at High School in Joliet, Illinois, John won parts in a great many musical productions including *Hello Dolly!*, *Oliver!* and *Anything Goes* and, after attending University in San Diego, John returned to the UK to pursue his career.

When asked which aspect of his varied career he enjoys most, Barrowman balks, finding it virtually impossible to single out just one highlight. Surely musical theatre is his biggest passion? "It's a major passion, yes," he concedes. "It's the one passion that gave me my start in the entertainment industry. I don't only enjoy musicals though. I'll never leave them, but I really enjoy doing television, because I get a private and personal life to a certain extent."

How about movies? Landing such a pivotal part in the recent Mel Brooks movie *The Producers* must have been a dream come true? "It was unbelievable!" says John. "And, one of the most surreal experiences I've ever had. I got off the plane and was literally picked up by car and driven to the hair and make-up artists' home. I sat in a chair for four hours and had my hair and my eyebrows bleached blonde, fitted for blue contacts and did make-up testing right there and then. The next day, I was in rehearsals learning all the choreography. In total it took about 5 weeks."

For those of you who've seen the movie, you'll remember John as the blond, blue-eyed Aryan stormtrooper responsible for belting out the production's biggest, and most notorious number, *Springtime for Hitler*. We venture to ask if John kept hold of the uniform...



I was up for the role of Will in *Will and Grace* and I was told that I am not gay enough. I was too straight!

"Now if I did, do you think I would say?" he says with a glint in his eye. "I'd get in a lot of trouble, but I know that there's many a boy that would like to see me in that once again. Particularly my partner!"

John is openly (and very proudly) gay, but is at pains to point out he is NOT a gay actor. It's a label that follows far too many successful lesbians or gay men in their careers. As Barrowman points out so succinctly, "If you were to interview Brad Pitt you don't say 'straight actor Brad Pitt'. It's just not an issue for them. Some newspapers do it for salacious reasons, to make it sound seedy. It's NOT seedy. It's not bad or wrong to be gay. Actually, the entertainment industry is probably still one of the most homophobic industries around, and the sad fact is it's mostly run by gay men and women."

So, when did you come out? When did you decide the time was right for people in your life to know? "I was never really 'in' amongst my colleagues, and my friends. I've just always been me," he says.

"I believe you shouldn't have to proclaim your sexuality. I understand why we have to do it, but I don't feel people should have to do it if they don't want to. I have friends who are gay that have never publicly said it, but they still live a gay lifestyle. I'm perfectly comfortable with that. I was asked in a *Playbill* interview for America about dating, and I said

I'd been with my (male) partner for 13 years. I kid you not, the guy's jaw dropped. I thought to myself, I'm in my thirties and I live with another man, I have two dogs that are groomed better than some people, my house is minimalist, and I'm in musical theatre... what other clues do you want?"

Has it ever been a problem in securing roles? "I was up for the role of Will in *Will and Grace* and I was told that I'm not gay enough, I was too straight!"

Our heads hurt. Is this some kind of reverse homophobia? We move on. Is *Will and Grace* a show you enjoy watching? "I don't watch it anymore, because Will would have a boyfriend," he says, with more than a hint of annoyance. "They need to stop playing this whole Grace thing. It so ain't going to happen! A gay man might fiddle-diddle and try something just to see what it was like, but at the end of the day they are going to go back to the boy. I think the reason they still do that on American TV is

because if they gave Will a boyfriend people would switch off. The whole premise is, she'll turn him. No she won't!"

Indeed. We're interested to hear how your family reacted to your sexuality. Did you have their support? "I've always had support from friends and family. I came out to my family when I was 21 years old because I wanted them involved in my life. I thought

they were going to disown me, and I was completely wrong. Actually, they were a little offended because they never brought me up to think in that negative way."

John is very obviously extremely proud of his parents' reactions. "It's every gay man and woman's fear that they are going to be shunned by their family, and I know so many people that have been," he says.

"My mother's reaction was, 'How dare they shun their children!' My Dad said, 'What we do in our bedroom we don't discuss with you, and what you do in your bedroom is your business.' They've actually lost a friend because of it, which for me is a huge deal. They've challenged their friends because of derogatory jokes and comments about gay men. And good on them for it!"

So, is it true you're entering into a civil partnership with your partner? "I haven't done it yet. I don't want any big hoo-haa. I want it to be very private and quiet with friends. I don't like calling it a marriage either, because it's a word synonymous with religion, and religion hates gay men. Why do we want to be part of something that hates us or dislikes us? Scott and I have been together thirteen years, and we're not doing it to legitimise our relationship, we're doing it show people that you can have a long-term relationship, and be two men or two women living together."

John Barrowman is passionate about many things, and not just his work. He is on the Board of Crusaid, and has seen the terrible effect HIV and AIDS has had on his industry. "My industry was the first to be heavily affected by HIV and AIDS," he says. "It killed companies, literally casts wiped out, generations wiped out, boyfriends, girlfriends, sons, daughters."

It is every gay man or woman's fear that they are going to be shunned by their family. I know many people who have.



I heard some of the bars in Manchester had a three minute silence when I was voted off *Dancing On Ice*...

In the last twelve months, John Barrowman's popularity has reached almost fever pitch with his turn as the bisexual Captain Jack on Russell T Davies' successful revamp of *Doctor Who*. We could do a whole issue of outnorthwest on gay men's fascination with the show (we count ourselves amongst them), so for Barrowman - a life long fan of the show - to be offered the part must have been the dream call?

His face lights up. "Thank God for Russell T. Davies! I just remember when I went into the screen-test and I sat and talked to Russell, and we just laughed! I said to him, 'Look, I'm not trying to be sycophantic and I'm not trying to kiss your ass here or anything, but if you gave me this job, you'd be making a young boy's dream come true.' And when I said that I just saw it in his face, because *Doctor Who* is the same for him. It's a young boys dream come true to be a part of it. When I got the call that I had the part, I was with my niece and I screamed the road down. It was unbelievable!"

Is it true Jack was only meant as a short-term character? "Yes, he was written for a couple of episodes and it just grew. At first people hated him. They thought he was too in-your-face, and too cocky which is what we wanted. The plan was to discover his charm and affection for humanity, and for Rose and The Doctor as the scripts evolved."

So when did you discover he'd be sticking around? "Literally after the second episode, the producers indicated that Jack was going to come back, and that he'd be in the next series. All that changed though, with Chris Eccleston leaving. Jack the character became so popular not just because of his bisexuality, but because of his humanity and everything. I was chuffed that this had happened

and oh my god, so like, bowled over by it. Jack became much bigger than we expected."

One of the most heart-warming things about the new *Doctor Who* is a whole new generation of children are becoming fans - just as we were back in the Seventies. The issue of Captain Jack's sexuality hasn't been a problem for them, has it?

"They SO don't care. I know of one little boy who said to his Dad, 'I don't care if he likes boys Daddy, I still think he's a hero.' His father came up to me at a *Doctor Who* convention and said, 'It made me feel so proud. My child was not discriminating against people.'"

So successful was Barrowman's turn as Captain Jack, that it was recently announced the character would return in his own spin-off show - *Torchwood* (an anagram of 'Doctor Who', fact fans), which begins filming in the next few weeks.

John is clearly over the moon about this. "They actually took me to dinner to tell me that I wasn't going to be in series two of *Doctor Who*, but in series three instead. I was fine with that. Then there was another meeting, and I thought they were going to tell me I wasn't even going to be in the third series. Then, all of a sudden they said, 'You're going to be in series three, and you're also going to have your own series and we're calling it *Torchwood*.' I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I stood up in the middle of the restaurant and did a 'WOOO!' dance. To have a series written for you by one of the most prolific writers of our time on television..."

We're DYING to know what it's about. You've read the first script... so... come on... dish it!

My industry was the first to be heavily affected by AIDS. It killed companies. Literally casts wiped out.

"No! I'm contractually obliged not to say anything! I've read the script and all I can tell you is that all the boys and girls, AND all the adults who love *Doctor Who* are going to be so pleasantly surprised. Jack's still going to be outrageous, but you're not going to see him naked or anything. It's going to be very scary. Things are going to happen on screen, and you're going to wonder how on Earth they thought it all up. It's Cardiff based, but it's set all around the UK. You might see me in Manchester, you might see me in other parts of the UK because... well, that's all I can tell you! Seriously, it's worth more than my life!"

So convinced are the BBC of it's potential, that from an original intention to screen it on late-night BBC Three, it's now been decided to screen the show on prime time BBC One. It looks like John Barrowman's star will be shining even brighter this year.

With his recent stint on *Dancing On Ice* cut horribly short ("I heard some of the bars in Manchester had a three minute silence when they noticed I was voted off! The clubs went quiet..."), John will also continue his small screen presence when he presents *This Morning* with Fern Britten at Easter.

Could John Barrowman BE any busier? It seems so. "When I'm done with *This Morning* I go... oh I can't talk about that yet, but there's another show with the BBC, possibly." What a tease...

Is this the busiest you've ever been? "No, this is normal." he says. "The only reason it's becoming public now is because of the TV I've been doing over here. I've done two stage shows at one time in the States while I was doing TV, so I've always kept myself busy. I don't like to be sitting around doing nothing! I know it won't last forever, and for me it's not about becoming famous, it's about doing good work and being respected in the craft that I have trained in. So I'd like to continue to do what I'm doing..."

A Jack of all trades that Mr Barrowman, and master of every single one of them. We fully intend to see him conquering Everest by August and sorting out a bit of world peace by Christmas.

Watch this space.

For our full, unedited interview with John Barrowman, go to: www.outnorthwest.com and click on this month's cover. For more on John Barrowman, visit: www.johnbarrowman.com

Torchwood will be on our screens later in the year. The new series of Doctor Who starts in April on BBC One.

Special thanks to The Malmaison London, and Ballans West, Earls Court.