Over the years 26 companions have done the rounds with the Doctor. Johnny Black meets some of his fellow travellers in time

**Doctor Who**
Wednesday 7.35pm BBC1

*Doctor Who* started a quarter of a century ago, in 1963, the same year as the first Beatles top ten hit, the introduction of the American Express Card and the assassination of President Kennedy.

Saturday tea-time viewers on 23 November 1963 had barely acclimatised themselves to the startling radiophonic theme music, before coming face to face in black and white with Carole Ann Ford playing Susan Foreman, clearly an unusual teenager. She was sitting in a modern classroom, reading a book about the French Revolution and looking very dubious indeed. ‘But that’s not right!’ she said.

As the episode unfolded, we discovered she was the granddaughter of an aged eccentric, played by William Hartnell, who was able to travel through time and space in a machine that looked exactly like a police box. Since then, we’ve been hooked.

Carole Ann Ford, an actress from the age of 8, vividly remembers how the role shot her from being a busy and successful actress to being a national star. ‘I was 21, playing a 15-year-old, and suddenly doing lots of newspaper interviews. When they asked what qualities were needed for the role, I said you had to be able to scream and run at the same time.’

This description was so apt it soon became a cliché and, as the series progressed, Ford discovered another essential quality. ‘You had to be able to say “What do we do next, Doctor?” hundreds of times with complete conviction!’

The intervening years brought not only women’s lib but a new realism in television that made those 60s stereotypes untenable.

‘The big change in the Doctor’s companions came in 1973,’ recalls the series’ longest-running producer, John Nathan-Turner. ‘Sarah Jane Smith, played by Liz Sladen, was much more independently minded. She was fiercely loyal to the Doctor but had her own opinions and always spoke her mind. After Sarah it would have been impossible to go back to the old kind of companions.’

Probably the most independently minded of the Doctor’s companions arrived with Louise Jameson’s 1977 portrayal of Leela, a primitive alien whose response to any threat was to stick a knife in it. ‘I’d done three years at the Royal Shakespeare Company and loads of rep, so my next move had to be into television,’ she recalls. ‘I auditioned for *The New Avengers* and the hospital series *Angels*, but I was delighted to become Leela because Doctor Who had been a Saturday ritual, with baked beans on toast in front of the fire, for my family since it started. I remember thinking I could now afford to build some shelves.’

Jameson was, however, stunned herself rapidly becoming a sex symbol. ‘I must have been very naive. It didn’t occur to me that running around in that revealing costume would have that effect on male viewers.’

Nathan-Turner feels that Leela’s character could not even be attempted now. ‘Given the change in attitudes to violence on TV, she simply wouldn’t be allowed.’

The Doctor has only once been partnered by a companion who was almost as intelligent as himself. Romana, portrayed by actress Mary Tamm in 1978, was a student Time Lord who often irritated the Doctor by displaying knowledge of techniques that even he had.

**KEY TO THE PARTNERS IN TIME**

1. Sophie Aldred as Ace
2. Elisabeth Sladen as Sarah Jane Smith
3. Janet Fielding as Tegan Jovanka
4. Jackie Lane as Dodo Chaplet
5. Peter Purves as Steven Taylor
6. Jean Marsh as Sara Kingdom
7. Nicola Bryant as Peri
8. Katy Manning as Jo Grant
9. Frazer Hines as Jamie McCrimmon
10. Mark Strickson as Turlough
11. Mary Tamm as Romana (I)
12. K9
13. Caroline John as Liz Shaw
14. Lalla Ward as Romana (II)
15. Wendy Padbury as Zoe
16. Louise Jameson as Leela
17. Carole Ann Ford as Susan Foreman
18. Bonnie Langford as Mef
113 never encountered. As John Nathan-Turner points out, this had many disadvantages.

'Companions were first introduced to give younger viewers someone to identify with, but it quickly became obvious that the "What do we do next, Doctor?" element was essential,' he explains. 'With complex plots, full of scientific notions that viewers might not immediately grasp, the companion could explain the plot, then the Doctor could explain it all in detail, so that the viewers knew what was going on.'

'When I took Romana on,' remembers Mary Tamm, 'the idea was that she would become as important as the Doctor - a partner rather than just a companion. That never materialised because the plots required someone to ask questions all the time.'

Disappointed by this stunting of the character's development, she left, but suggested her friend, Lalla Ward, as a replacement. Ward's Romana was deliberately made more vulnerable and less intelligent. She subsequently married the Doctor of that era, Tom Baker, which seemed to suggest that casting her had been the right decision.

Extraordinary as it may seem, this was not the first marriage of a Doctor and companion. Jon Pertwee, the Doctor from 1970-74, was married to Jean Marsh, who had played 'futuristic space agent' Sara Kingdom in the shortest run of any companion, between November 1966 and January 1967.

Often coming from alien worlds, companions frequently sport fanciful names. This was the case with Adric, Nyssa, Kamelion and Turlough but, despite being called Perpugilliam, the doctor's assistant from 1984-86 was from America. Fortunately, she was known as Peri for short.

'I was so convinced that I wouldn't get Peri's part that I just didn't get nervous at the audition,' remembers Nicola Bryant. 'That's probably why I got it.'

Like many companions, she found the role made her face so familiar that she became typecast. 'For about two years after, I could only get parts playing Americans, although I was born in Surrey.'

Carole Ann Ford found a similar problem back in the 60s. 'I tried to break away from countless kooky teenager roles by playing a prostitute in the seedy detective series Public Eye. All that happened was that I got hundreds of outraged letters from mothers asking how I dared upset their children so much!' Louise Jameson, too, found herself playing science-fiction roles and assistants until, five years later, she became one of the women prisoners in Tenko. Now, she appears regularly in Bergerac.

It often surprises those who grew up knowing Peter Purves as the presenter of Blue Peter to discover that he had a spell as a companion. Purves landed his role after failing an audition to be a giant insect. 'The director took me aside and said I was too good for that sort of thing, and he'd get in touch with me when something better came up. I was heartbroken. I was flat broke and needed the money. I was sure that I'd never hear from him again.'

To his delight, the phone rang some weeks later and Purves became space pilot Steven Taylor from July 65 to June 66. Nowadays, as well as continuing TV work with Crimewatch Midlands, Purves runs his own video production company.

'The Doctor's current companion, Ace, is played by Sophie Aldred who was barely 1 year old when the series began. In the Carole Ann Ford tradition, Sophie is 26 playing 16. 'They needed someone who looked young for her age and could ride a motorbike,' says Aldred, 'so I was just right. I also do virtually all my own stunts. I've had to jump into a freezing river and beat up a Dalek with my baseball bat.'

'I've always known lots of fans on the show, but they were so enthusiastic they actually put me off watching it.' As a result Sophie didn't even see Doctor Who until the Pertwee years. Unfortunately, her rapidly escalating fear of the Cybermen caused her to spend most Saturday tea-times behind the sofa.

In the end, my mum banned me from watching it. Now I finally have the chance to get my revenge on the Cybermen.' (Wednesday's new story features the monsters who are second only in evil to the Daleks in the estimation of the show's fans.)

Sophie has no fears of being typecast because she's simultaneously appearing as presenter of the BBC1 children's show Corners. 'When Doctor Who ends I'll be able to prove I can do much more than just run and scream at the same time,' she laughs, 'not that Ace would behave in such a fashion. But just in case, I'll be changing my hairstyle too.'

Sylvestor McCoy talks about My Kind of Day on page 118.

The Doctor Who Anniversary Album, out on 26 November, features music from 25 years of the series, including all versions of the theme: REC 707 (LP); ZCF 707 (cassette); BBCCD 707 (compact disc). From the BBC Radio Collection there is a Doctor Who double cassette (ZBBC 1020). It features two dramatised stories, 'The Genesis of the Daleks', starring Tom Baker, and 'Slipback' - the only Doctor Who story created just for radio - starring Colin Baker.

And here's Who they travelled with (from top): William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, Jon Pertwee, Tom Baker, Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy

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