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Dr. Who
Fanatical fans fuss over fifth ‘Dr. Who’ — Peter Davison

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Hey, what's all the fuss?

It's 'Who,' that's what!

Peter Davison, who is probably best known for his portrayal of a bungling veterinarian in the PBS series "All Creatures Great and Small," is the fifth actor to play Doctor Who during the last 20 years. The popular British Broadcasting Corporation production is being shot in Chicago at 11 p.m. Sundays on WTTW Channel 11.

Abundance at its dawn. He negotiated with Doctor Who's agent for more than a year to get the role and this history day was his reward.

But more about Davison later. Davison in the run of the hour.

That he was chosen in the good doctor by executive producer John Nathan-Turner makes sense. Peter's been watching the show since he was 12.

"It was a very extraordinary idea for me when they suggested I do this," Davison said, looking more like the villain in "All Creatures" in his tweeds and sable ermine than his "Doctor Who" characterization in long coat and cricket cap.

"It terrified me, but in it not an opportunity you can turn down because it terrifies you. A great part of the show's personality is the idea of changing actors has been managed and that has enabled it to go on for 20 years. It couldn't have done that with just one actor. But the show also has something of everything in it. It is an adventure, it's humorous, and it's a great opportunity to do different sorts of stories. And the character is enduring."

While Chicago audiences are not beginning to get a look at Davison's "Doctor Who," the busy actor is scheduled as to how many hours will last in the science fiction format.

The show this year, which will be his third, "he said, "and after that, I don't know."

The four previous Doctor Whos left the show of their own accord. By American standards, that there have been five successful series of a continuing series is remarkable. As you may have noticed, instead prime-time network shows don't last anything close to 20 years but the "Doctor Who" format would have started on American television, it would have been canceled after three episodes," Davison said. "The fact that it's successful 20 years later maybe says that the powers that he shouldn't cancel American programs quite so hastily as they do. Let's let the best of the best series run - eternity, and I think that the Great advantage British television has over American."

Yank viewers soon will make their own judgments about Davison's doctor, but he sees the character as a unique one.

"I wasn't cast because I could do a pale imitation of Tom Baker," he insisted. "I've tried to take characteristics from the other doctors because I had to start somewhere. But I am slightly more na" than Tom, and a bit more vulnerable."

One hopes Chicago's "Doctor Who" fans appreciate the vulnerability, because they appeared to get it. Even in the point of boycon Channel 11's March fund-raising drive because they suspected the station was falling on buying the Davison episode.

BREED EVEN ORGANIZED by United Doctor Who Network of Chicago, an effusive organization of local "Doctor Who" fans, including the Chicago Pagan Network, the Enthusiasts of the White Guardian and Friends of Doctor Who, used this drive to get the new show. Brehm was just one of them. Several fans have spoken for less than 1,000.

"Doctor Who" fans in the area.

Brehm's reaction to the script. "I'd hate to say what it is, but I was impressed," he said. "It's coming up with the new episodes and it's coming with the new Doctor Who" fans.

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by Gordon Wade

It's one of those late winter days in Chicago, when the snow is gone, the ground is brown and the sky is gray and the girl that lives down the street in the bungalow next door is always out in the sun. Regardless of how good you look when you walk out into such a day, within five minutes you feel like a man has been a thief of sunlight from Cheyenne to Dodge City. It's late March.

West Belmont Avenue is particularly nonsensical at this time of year, with Saturday morning shoppers hurrying from one dime store to another, and an atomic sun peering at the sky that is thinner but more gray than blue. Theleton that has accumulated over the winter months begins to surface and is whipped into a frenzy by an incoming wind. So that's what this strong of young people, six deep, straddling down the sidewalk and around the blackboard what brings them to Belmont Avenue on such a despicable day?

They have been waiting a long time in front of the New Fantasy Shop to see the object of their desire, and they will, if necessary, wait a lot longer.

The NEW FANTASY Shop remembers most of the other great operations that have flourished west of Central. It's not the kind of place that draws a crowd. Usually, you just walk in and you're around for whatever science fiction memorabilia suits your fancy.

On this day, however, enormous crowds have filled both floors, filling an old coach beside a quilt, one Peter Davison, a proper and youthful looking young man, standing in the corner of the comic book store could well be a best seller. From Belmont Avenue, or even Michigan Avenue, without attracting attention.

Davison, however, probably best known to American television audiences at one of the stars of the PIS series "All Creatures Great and Small," because the reasons for the folks outside. They couldn't be any less about "All Creatures. They want to see them.

You see, a couple of years ago, Davison replaced the venerable Tom Baker at the EEN actor to portray "Doctor Who" in the 34-year-old British Broadcasting Corp. science fiction television series, WTTW Channel 11 has been overseas the show since 1973, when Jim Perry portrayed a good-natured fellow who traveled through time and space in a police call box.

Back then, not many Chicagoans had heard of "Doctor Who," much less watched it, but as the late 1970s, with Tom Baker in the leading role, the program began to build a steady audience of faithful fans. Demanding fans, WTTW officials would later admit. The series estimates that about a quarter of a million viewers tune in to the show on Sunday nights at 11 p.m., even for reruns.

No matter that on this day, none of the "Doctor Who" fans who had sat through Tom Baker reruns had any idea who or where they might see the "Doctor Who" before passed to the gentlemanly Davison, Channel 11, after all, had already paid for the rights to another year and half of a worth of Tom Baker reruns, and even though the BBC was making the newer Davison episodes available for American distribution, it wasn't known when they might air in Chicago, or if WTTW would chill out the books for more shows.

No matter that Davison, 21, and his lovely wife, Brenda, were delayed in making their appearance at the New Fantasy Shop. No matter that cold grit was blowing into the faces of everyone waiting in the line. Those folks were ready for the show.

Most television hipsters -- and Davison, who start in two other comic strip series in England as well as his "Doctor Who" shows, is a luminary -- travel in style when they are beating the drum for their shows. They usually don't appear at places like the New Fantasy Shop.

But there Davison was, his wife beside him, sitting in the back row of the crowd and finshed in contemporary Ansteys, giving them a way to the now in the Century Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas some weeks ago. The Davisons, in fact, was, on a vacation, his bloody ex-wife for God's sake -- and stopped at the store only at the urging of owner George Brehm.

Brehm then got caught up as your ultimate "Doctor Who" fan. For good reason. He makes money selling "Doctor Who" related merchandise, which is available in

Cover photo by Scott Sanders
Fans, right, who waited several hours in subfreezing temperatures in front of The New Fantasy Shop on West Belmont Avenue to get a peek at their television hero, Dr. Who, don’t go away empty-handed as British actor Peter Davison, above, springs from the modest police call box that transports the character through time and space. The science fiction program has entertained English audiences for the last 20 years.

Fanatical fans making a fuss over fifth Dr. Who

(Continued from Page 2) would boycott the pledge activities, from which WTTW derives most of its operating revenue. It should be noted that during the last two years, "Doctor Who" fans, many wearing the flowing scarves that Baker fancied, helped answer WTTW phones 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," Breg 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 picked up the episodes a long time ago. That assertion repeatedly irked Richard Turner, WTTW’s director of information services and advertising. Breg also now acknowledges that assertion was inaccurate.

"Lionheart (Television International, which syndicates the series) chose to do a market-by-market release in this country," Turner noted. "They finally responded to our inquiries from July 1982 as to when the new episodes would be available. On March 1, they agreed to meet with us and discuss the acquisition of the new Davison episodes."

Not surprisingly, the price for the new "Dr. Who" segments were considerably more than the Baker episodes because of the increased popularity of the show. But by 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 was not the blockbuster some of the fans claim it is. The program draws fewer viewers than "Sneak Previews" and less than half the audience that tunes in for, say, National Geographic specials.

THE FIRST Davison episode was aired April 24 and will continue on Sunday 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. Breg, 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 over.

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 noted. "But there may be a few ill feelings down there."