

Cult-show conventions

By Stephanie Shapiro
Evening Sun Staff

FROM HER HOME in faraway Delmar, Md., Betty Jane Birch, homemaker and devout Whovian, stitches a Dr. Who costume for her 6-year-old daughter, Becky.

That is, the costume worn by Dr. Who number four — Tom Baker, the curly haired, time-traveling Time Lord from the Planet Gallifrey, who appears befuddled by life as only a super being with 13 lives could be.

"She'll tell you she wants to grow up and be Tom Baker," Birch says of Becky. At the age of 3, "She could name all the doctors for you," she proudly adds.

This is the 26th season for "Dr. Who," a shoestring budget British science fiction television production that aired for the first time on the BBC the day after John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It is the longest-running science fiction tele-

The Whovians, Trekkies and 'B&B' fans are coming to town

vision show in history, according to David Blaise, president of The Friends of Doctor Who, a fan club with 5,000 members based in Conshohocken, Pa.

It is also a way of life; for the Birch women and for the 700 fans expected to gather tomorrow at the Omni Inner Harbor Hotel to hold panel discussions, exchange Whovian trivia, perform in home-grown Who dramas, compete in costume contests and meet Baker at a "Day with the Doctor."

Fans of cult television programs may choose from various alternative worlds this weekend. In Hunt Valley, the first

Fan-Out Multi-media convention also takes place, with a focus on "Star Trek" and "Beauty and the Beast." This "con" as they are referred to on the circuit, is the first produced by Baltimorean Mari-on McChesney and her out-of-state partners, who hope to turn their devotion to the tube's more inspired moments into a profession.

Dianne Hartzell, a "Beauty and the Beast" fanatic from Glen Burnie, will be at Fan-Out, along with the friends she has met on the "B&B" network. Hartzell belongs to 10 monthly and bi-monthly publications related to the defunct program and corresponds regularly with 22 other fans. "Our network is unreal, believe me," she says. "We knew of the show's cancellation the night before, last May, before it was in the press," she boasts.

Hartzell's collection of "B&B" memorabilia has been featured in two different local library displays. One exhibit included a selection of books the beast Vincent quoted on the program, including the works of Shakespeare, Yeats, Dylan Thomas and Wordsworth. Also dis-

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Dr. Who has been played by (top row, from left) Jon Pertwee, Colin Baker, (middle row) Peter Davison, Sylvester McCoy, (bottom row) Patrick Troughton, William Hartnell and Tom Baker.

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played was an album of poetry and music recorded by "B&B" star Ron Perlman in Vincent's voice. It is called "Of Love and Hope," and sold over 250,000 copies, Hartzell says.

By defying the earthly limitations that strain passion from our lives, it seems these programs inspire fantastic visions of love and hope and charity among their followers. Hartzell speaks of the good works performed for homeless shelters, the poor and battered women in the name of "Beauty and the Beast" by its zealous following.

And Birch, a founder of the Delmarva Whoovian Society, speaks of Dr. Who's mind challenge. "It's a vehicle for your imagination. They don't have the budget to do all these special effects and you don't have all the answers." Dr. Who's ability to travel through time and space in a vehicle disguised as a British phone booth "gives the story unlimited possibilities," Birch adds.

"I feel it's different than most other programs that have some sort of fan following," Blaise says. "We go to these conventions and the people who come up are just really into the program. A lot of them are extremely intelligent."

Tomorrow at the Omni, Birch will be in costume at the Omni gathering as the second Dr. Who, Patrick Troughton, who happened to die of a heart attack at a convention in Macon, Ga., three years ago. "In my case there have been in fact embarrassing situations where I costume so well I'm pushed out of the ladies room," Birch says.

Birch has traveled to Minnesota, Ohio, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta to Dr. Who cons. This April, she and her family will visit England and follow a travel guide written by two American women who tracked Dr. Who's adventures throughout Britain. "Your degree of being a fan can be from watching and enjoying the show to be willing to travel over the

world to meet the persons you're interested in and indulging in the various and sundry science fiction merchandise available," Birch explains.

Tom Baker's appearance at the Omni is sponsored by the Friends of Doctor Who. A limited number of tickets will be available at the door for \$25. For more information, call 752-1100.

At 10 p.m. tomorrow night, Baker will appear live on MPT during a Dr. Who Special pledge drive. The first episodes of "Dr. Who" with Patrick Troughton will also air. Normally, "Dr. Who" is broadcast at 11 p.m. Saturdays on channels 22 and 67.

Fan-Out takes place today through Sunday at the Marriott Hunt Valley Inn. Guest stars include Linda Campanelli and M.M. Shelly Moore, executive story editors for "Beauty and the Beast," and John deLancie, who plays "Q" on "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Call 676-7330.