

POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX

As the Time Lord clocks up 60 years, **David Tennant** is back in control of the Tardis – but for how long? And what's next? In *RT's* anniversary celebration, we talk to stars old and new – and track down Tom Baker

INTERVIEW BY
HUW FULLERTON

‘DOCTOR WHO WILL FOLLOW ME FOR THE REST OF TIME’

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DAVID TENNANT HAD it all. As the tenth Doctor he was a fan-favourite with a run of episodes that reached more than 13 million viewers in the UK – a record for the modern revival of *Doctor Who*, which almost rivalled its 1970s heyday. He left on his own terms in 2010 rather than being shoved aside for a younger, cooler star (in fact, the BBC wanted him to stay longer). His legacy set him up for lucrative convention appearances and fan worship for life, while his post-*Who* career is flourishing. So why risk it all by returning?

“I hadn’t thought about it like that,” Tennant laughs. “Thank God I made it to this point! It never really occurred to me to worry about that. Perhaps it should have done... but with Catherine [Tate] being part of it, and with Russell [T Davies] writing the scripts, I never actually worried about anything other than my own ability to run as fast as I used to.”

In fairness, while the return of old favourites to a stage they’ve vacated can sometimes tarnish a legacy, Tennant’s Doctor is a special case. Apart from Tom Baker, it’s hard to think of a *Doctor Who* star who so captured the public’s imagination. At the height of his career on the show, Tennant was plastered on magazine covers and lunchboxes; he was accosted in the street. In 2009, he was the BBC’s Christmas ident. By the time he left, aged 39, one suspects he could have been reading the phone book to a Dalek and viewers would still have tuned in.

Happily this comeback, announced to great fanfare last year, is a little more involved than that. “The first conversation we had about it was very casual,” Tennant recalls. “Russell and Catherine were talking about the notion of: ‘What if we got the band back together for one last special? But David would never do it.’ And I said, ‘What do you mean I’d never do it? I’d do it in a shot. And then suddenly, we were back for three in a row.”

“I mean, why not?” he laughs. “It was such a joyous time, and these are people I love as humans, and certainly love as people to work with. And *Doctor Who* is something that will always be hugely important to me.”

In fact, there’s a case to be made that the 52-year-old Tennant – who’s speaking to us the day after his birthday, ever committed to the show – never really left *Doctor Who* behind in the first place. Yes, he’s had many successes

since – *Broadchurch*, *Good Omens*, *Des*, *Marvel’s Jessica Jones* and *Staged* to name but a few – but he’s always kept a foot in the Tardis door. After all, it was just three years after his dramatic regeneration that he teamed up with his successor Matt Smith for 2013’s 50th-anniversary special.

“I was sort of a member of the guest cast on that, because it was Matt’s show,” says Tennant now. “It’s different when you’re in charge of the Tardis again. There’s a lot more work to do. I remember on the 50th, going, ‘Oh, this is easy. I used to have to learn far more lines than this!’”

Two years after that, Tennant was back headlining his own *Doctor Who* stories for a series of audio dramas co-starring – and this sounds familiar – ex-companion Catherine Tate. He’s kept playing the Doctor that way ever since, lending his voice to audio plays and (more recently) video games starring his character.

THE DOCTOR EVEN looms large in Tennant’s personal life. He married a guest actor on the series – Georgia Moffett, who appeared in a 2008 episode with him – which means his father-in-law is former fifth Doctor Peter Davison. He also has a police box cut-out in his garden. Given all this, it’s hard to imagine why Davies and Tate thought this on-screen return would be a hard sell.

“The truth is, it’s a rather lovely, benevolent, generous thing to be connected with. I love it. I always have, and I’m sure I always will,” says

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Tennant. “I grew up with posters on my wall signed by Tom Baker. It’s very peculiar that I should end up in the show that was, to a greater or lesser extent, the thing that inspired me to be in the profession I’m in.

“It runs through my life as if through a stick of rock, really. As you say, I met my wife on the set of *Doctor Who*, and I’m now a father. I’ve given up trying to resist the inevitability that *Doctor Who* will be following me around for the rest of time.”

Instead, he’s embraced it. So, this week he returns as the Doctor on BBC1 – but not the same one he played before. Originally, Tennant says the plan was for him and Tate to return for the anniversary in a flashback episode, set during their shared 2008 series and with a storyline completely different from the specials as they now exist.

“It would have been an unseen adventure from years before,” he says. “Russell immediately had an idea for a story, which I’m not going to mention because I don’t think it’s yet seen the light of day. It certainly wouldn’t have been part >



NOW AND THEN
Main picture: David Tennant is now the 14th Doctor. Below: reunited with Donna (Catherine Tate) and her husband Shaun (Karl Collins). Bottom: Donna and the tenth Doctor in 2006





In particular, he says that the second and third specials go in unusual directions. “With two and three, Russell has written *Doctor Who* like I have never seen it before,” he reveals. “He’s come back to it with a whole new raft of ideas and enthusiasm. I’m just very chuffed to be able to be part of that.”

But of course, he’s not going to be part of it for long. Davies describes Tennant’s new incarnation as a “Magnesium Doctor” – in other words, he burns brightly but not for long – because at the end of the third special, airing on 9 December, he’ll regenerate into new

Doctor Ncuti Gatwa. The 31-year-old *Sex Education* star takes over for the Christmas special, followed by a full series next year (and beyond – he’s already filming episodes that will be shown in 2025).

“I have seen a bit of Ncuti, and he’s magnificent,” Tennant says. “He’s just got such an energy. He’s so creative, and he’s inventive, and he’s funny, and he’s a proper actor. I think he’s going to be great.

“I’ve met Millie Gibson [new companion Ruby, right], and she seems lovely, too. I haven’t got a chance to see any of her stuff yet, but they seem great together. I’m jealous of the adventure they’ve got in front of them.”

When asked if he has any advice for his successor, Tennant seems vaguely horrified – “What would I say? I mean, literally, what would I say?” I suggest he might prepare Gatwa to return in about 18 years. “Well, he’s young,” Tennant laughs. “He’ll get into the 100th anniversary, probably. I don’t know if I’ll make it that far. Though if I can keep running fast enough – I don’t know. I never imagined that I would be sitting there for the 60th anniversary, talking about three specials we’d made. This show continues to surprise everyone involved with it.”

STILL, IT MUST be hard to hand over the Tardis so soon after getting hold of it again. Was there a moment, just for a second, where he thought about snatching back the sonic screwdriver, barricading the studio and staying on for a full series?

Even as a lifelong fan, he says not. “It was never on the table,” Tennant says firmly. “The story – well, as soon as I start to talk about this, we get into the area of spoilers, so I’m not going to say any more. All I know is that I’m excited and jealous of everything that Ncuti has in front of him. And I can’t wait to enjoy it as a viewer, because I think he’s magnificent.”

He laughs. “I think they thought, ‘Let the old man run around for a minute – and then we’ll get a nice, young bloke in.’”

The first Doctor Who special airs this Saturday on BBC1 with two more to follow on 2 and 9 December

◁ of an ongoing story. But I hope one day he does use it because it sounded great.”

But Davies’s return to the BBC fold as the new *Who* showrunner changed everything.

“Then Russell decided he was coming back full-time and the whole thing blossomed,” says Tennant. Suddenly, the one-off had turned into a trio of specials for *Doctor Who*’s 60th anniversary.

DAVIES TELLS ME later: “It was simply as many episodes as David and Catherine could do. If they had said, ‘We’ve got time to make 12,’ we would have made 12. If they had said, ‘We’ve got time to make one,’ then we’d

‘I’m jealous of the adventure Ncuti has in front of him’

have made one. But I think a one-off would have been a disappointment.”

And it was a flashback no longer. Instead, Tennant plays a new (and official) incarnation of the Doctor that follows on from his younger self and the Doctors that came after – Matt Smith, Peter Capaldi and Jodie Whittaker – in a way that’s woven into the story of the specials (titled *The Star Beast*, *Wild Blue Yonder* and *The Gigggle*).

“That’s part of what the Doctor himself is struggling with: why is he here?” says Tennant. “Why has he got this face back, and what might that mean? Though you’re still in a recognisably *Doctor Who* world, and I think that’s right and proper,” he adds. “It gets you back into those stories that you know and love and recognise, with some elements in there that are unexpected.”



TIMES TWO
David Tennant with his wife Georgia and (above) with Matt Smith in 2013