

# STYLE

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*Doctor,  
doctor!*  
Neuti Gatwa is  
out of this world

Plus

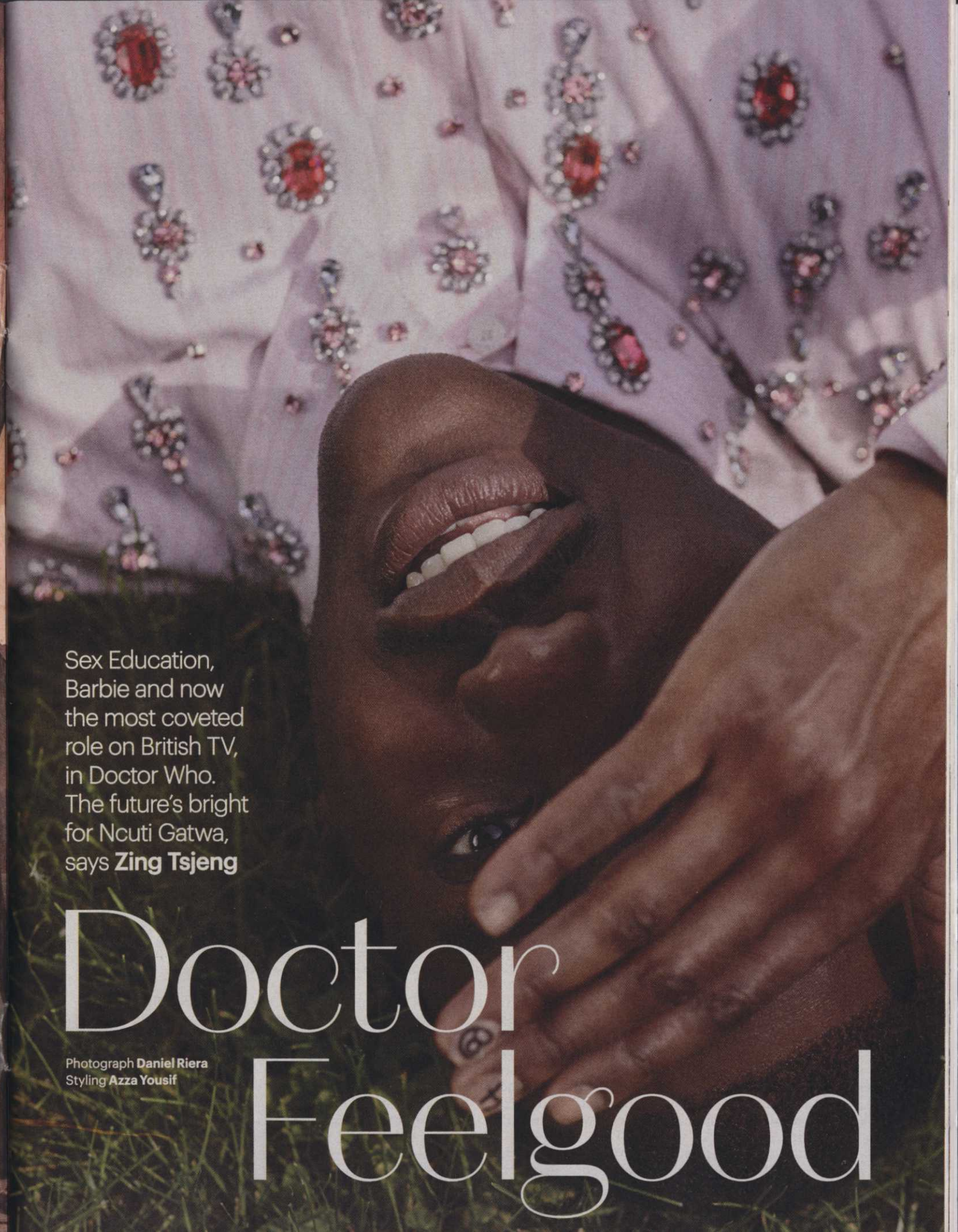
LAST DAYS  
OF DISCO  
THE RETURN  
OF LONDON'S  
MOST ICONIC  
CLUB

GRAB THE  
INCENSE!  
HOW TO  
BE A HAUTE  
HIPPIE





**This page** White top, £125, SS Daley. Coat, price on application, Wales Bonner. Shorts, £990, Valentino. Boots, £475, Grenson. Socks, stylist's own. **Opposite** Shirt with cabochon embroidery, POA, Dior Men

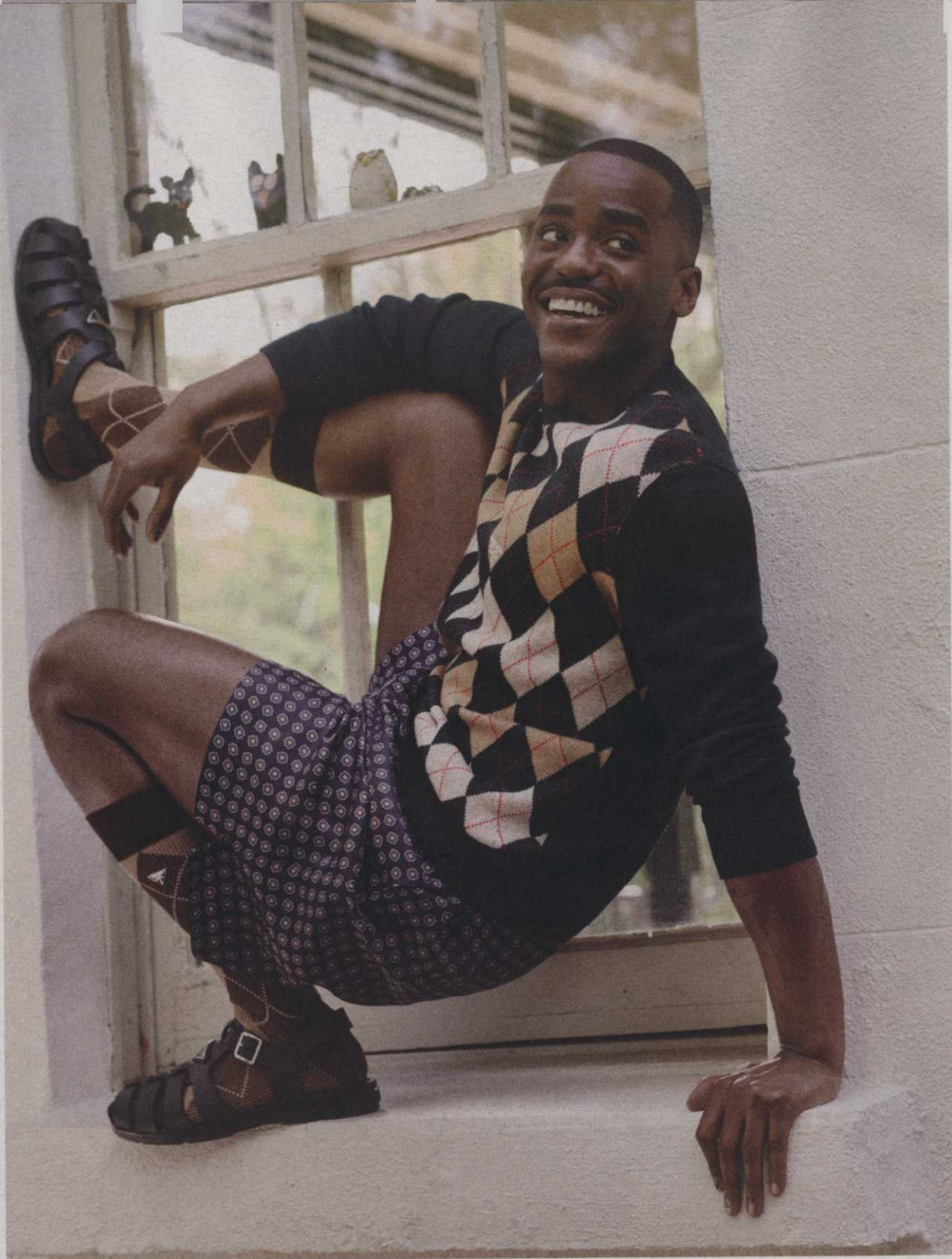


Sex Education, Barbie and now the most coveted role on British TV, in Doctor Who. The future's bright for Ncuti Gatwa, says **Zing Tsjeng**

Photograph **Daniel Riera**  
Styling **Azza Yousif**

# Doctor Feelgood





**Ncuti Gatwa is a man of a million laughs.** There's the snicker that segues into a cackle of electric mischief. There's the howl of laughter that sounds like the roar of a Boeing 747 taking off. Then there's the contemplative belly laugh as he ponders what to say next, followed quickly by a delighted chortle as he pulls up another entertaining anecdote (of which he has many). If the NHS could somehow prescribe Ncuti Gatwa all winter, he could single-handedly cure SAD.

With the stupendously upright carriage of a dancer, the 31-year-old enters the Langham hotel, London, dressed in

leggings and a smart Ralph Lauren polo, looking like an Ascot jockey who moonlights at the Royal Ballet. Just a few weeks ago, in fact, he was dancing alongside Ryan Gosling at the Oscars for a rendition of *I'm Just Ken*, the Grammy-nominated song from the *Barbie* soundtrack. "I couldn't believe what was happening," Gatwa says, eyes widening. "I was like, what am I doing? I was literally filming *Doctor Who* yesterday and suddenly I'm here at the Oscars!" Gosling personally requested the presence of the "other" Kens, Gatwa says, to "invite us all up to share that moment with him". "It just speaks so much of his character," he

**This page** Shirt, £750, Valentino. Jumper, £475, Winnie New York. Kilt, £475, Jordanluca. Boots, £295, Russell & Bromley. Tie, £200, Valentino Garavani. Sporran, £220, MacGregor & MacDuff. Socks, stylist's own.  
**Opposite** Jumper, £1,470, shorts, £1,010, sandals, £630, and socks, £230, Prada







Shirt, £660, and trousers, £650, Botter. Kilt, £635, MacGregor & MacDuff. Shoes, £940, Church's



From top Gatwa with Asa Butterfield in *Sex Education*; with fellow "Kens" Kingsley Ben-Adir and Ryan Gosling in *Barbie*; and as the Doctor, in the Tardis, with Millie Gibson as his assistant, Ruby Sunday

says. The group performance was more than "kenough" to steal the show — it quickly went viral. Even Steven Spielberg stood up and applauded in the Dolby Theatre.

These days Gatwa's career can best be summed up as an unlocked door — one little push and he's in. In 2022 he landed his dream role of the Doctor, the latest incarnation of the most iconic role going in British film and TV (James Bond and Paddington Bear excepted), an international hit watched in more than 50 countries. Aside from Harry Potter it's the closest thing that Britain has to a Marvel-level cultural franchise, with a sprawling universe and fandom to match. Gatwa had sent a hopeful text to his agent saying he'd love to pitch himself for the role; a week later said agent was writing an email to Andy Pryor, the show's casting director, when Pryor phoned to ask if Gatwa might be interested. Gatwa still looks dazed by it all. "The serendipity of it was crazy. Like, what the hell!" Another week later he was auditioning in front of Russell T Davies, its returning showrunner, and got the job.

"After *Sex Education* came out there were a lot of offers and projects coming my way but they were all versions of Eric," Gatwa says of his character, the irrepressible teenager Eric Effiong in the Emmy-winning hit Netflix series. "I was adamant that I wanted to do something completely different for my next role." Then fate threw another opportunity his way: a month after getting *Doctor Who* he nailed his audition for *Barbie*, leaving such an impression on its director, Greta Gerwig, that she noted him down as "Ken Ncuti". This was quickly followed by the final series of *Sex Education*. That's before you even get into his role as the dashing fighter pilot Robert Daniels in *Masters of the Air*,

**'Doctor Who? I really hope I don't f\*\*\* this up. It's 60 years' worth of a show that everyone loves'**

Apple TV+'s epic Second World War series. "I haven't stopped working in like 16 months or something," Gatwa says, "which is blessings upon blessings." He stopped for breath on a holiday to Rio late last year, drinking sundowners on Copacabana beach and struggling up Sugarloaf Mountain in the morning. "I was trying to drag my two besties along but they were always hungover."

Gatwa was born in Rwanda, but his parents fled the 1994 genocide and were granted asylum, settling in Scotland when he was a toddler. He had a "very bonny childhood" in the family accommodation halls of Edinburgh University, where his father was studying for his PhD: "So many kids from all over the world, playing all day long." Then, he continues with a dramatic clap, "my dad finished studying and we moved to the harsh reality of a council estate — ha-ha! That was an education that you can't get in Oxford." What did he learn on the mean streets of Oxfangs? "How to throw a punch and run fast!"

Growing serious, he adds: "It was hard to be one of the only black families there. But then it gives you tough, thick skin." By 14 he was shimmying down the drainpipe from the top floor of his parents' house and sneaking into clubs. Sounds like he rebelled hard, I say. He gives me a look. "Well, I don't know whether I'd call it rebelling because I never got caught."

In his mid-teens Gatwa's family moved to Fife. All he knew was that, unlike his classmates, he did not want to attend university: "My teacher was like, 'You need to think about going to drama school. You have something.'" He auditioned for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland — one of the top performing arts institutions in the world — and got in. "I was 17 when I went," he recalls. "I was so green." He learnt Chekhov, Shakespeare, Molière; did ballet in the morning and acting in the afternoon.

After graduating he picked up a steady run of gigs — Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* at Home Theatre in Manchester, Demetrius in a Shakespeare's Globe production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — but then theatreland's doors slammed shut in his face. The roles dried up, along with his finances. He ended up homeless, temping at Harrods by day and sleeping on friends' couches at night.

The experience profoundly affected his approach to work. "My perception of an actor will never not be a







Pink top, £150,  
Lazoschmidl. Black  
top, POA, Martine  
Rose. Shirt, £251,  
MSGM. Shorts, £415,  
JW Anderson

**Hair** Chris Okonta.  
**Grooming** Carlos  
Ferraz at Carol Hayes  
Management  
using Ziip Halo.  
**Local production**  
ArtWorld Agency

waiter serving coffee in Costa," he says. "That to me is the experience of being an actor, being out of work. Not having any money. Meeting up with your friends to do a read-through with cups of tea and lots of wine. It's the sort of actor that I think I am ..." He trails off. "I'm still getting used to being a screen actor." Gatwa can barely bring himself to use the word "famous". While filming his first *Doctor Who* episodes he was beset by anxiety: "I really hope I don't f\*\*\* this up. It's 60 years' worth of a show that everyone loves. From the moment I woke up to the moment I went to bed my heart was racing. My brain went

into overdrive. I was calling the execs. 'Is there nothing that we can touch up?'" He adds drily, "I can be a bit of a control freak sometimes."

As with most beloved franchises, any new series of *Doctor Who* mobilises fans and detractors — sometimes they're even the same person. As the first black man to play the Doctor, Gatwa — much like his trailblazing predecessor Jodie Whittaker, the first woman to occupy the role — has to entertain old and new audiences, and bat away criticism that the show has descended into "weary, wokey preaching", as one tabloid sneeringly put it. "[The





Gatwa's full-throttle fashion is always a red carpet highlight

BBC have] been very protective," Gatwa says. "They were like, 'We're gonna walk you through the whole Comic Con world slowly and get you used to it.'"

Thankfully Gatwa's first proper appearance in the Christmas special — twirling in a handsome kilt, megawatt charm on full display while fending off goblins (it's *Doctor Who*, don't ask) — was ecstatically received by critics and said fans alike. Here was a Doctor who could front a Burberry billboard and win over your nan, a Hollywood-ready star.

For Gatwa the days leading up to the special were "excruciating". It was only after it aired that he was finally able to relax — if only for a second. "I was able to calm down a bit," he says. How's his anxiety doing? "I'd say it's at a healthy place."

Like his time-hopping Gallifreyan counterpart, Gatwa has travelled a long way from his origins. The formerly out-of-work actor is brutally honest about his pinch-me moment. "I don't know how gross this is to say," he says, "but [it was] the first pay cheque from *Sex Education*." The Netflix show changed everything for Gatwa — as it did for a host of other young unknowns, including his *Barbie* co-stars Emma Mackey and Connor Swindells. When filming started Gatwa's best friend was still lending him £10 a week for basic necessities. "I had never seen that amount of money," he says of his first payslip. "I remember being in a car with Emma when we both got paid at the same time. She was like, 'Oh my God, we got paid again!'" Was it four or five figures? Gatwa lets out an explosive laugh. "I'm not telling you!"

In the first month it aired *Sex Education* was streamed by more than 40 million households. Overnight Gatwa became one of the most recognised new faces on telly, playing a character that few viewers had seen: an exuberant, gay, British-Nigerian teenager who is ultimately loved and embraced by his family. "Playing Eric definitely helped me be braver in myself," he reflects. Gatwa, like Eric, was raised in a religious household and is queer himself. "It's hard when you sit in between a lot of different intersections and you can feel at times, especially at that young age, that they are in conflict with one another. And it's like, no." His voice grows soft but sure. "You can exist as multiple things. You don't have to cut off any part of yourself."

Gatwa recounts a DM he received from one closeted fan, who wrote: "When I watch the show, I'm able to escape to my dreams." He grows visibly emotional. "That's so awful... that people have to go to their dreams to be happy." When Gatwa first started getting recognised and messages like this — cries for help, really — began pouring into his inbox, "you feel like a bit like a fraud", he says. "Because I'm not saving anyone. I'm not a doctor. I'm not a social worker. Technically all I've done is my job. I had to remember, think of the first time you saw *Moonlight* and what that felt like — so powerful you can cry even just thinking about it. Maybe that's what you've done for [people]." Even now he looks embarrassed to make the comparison.

If *Sex Education* got his foot in the door, playing Ken and the Doctor has booted it down. While filming in Wales his *Doctor Who* co-star Jonathan Groff sneaked him into the VIP section for Beyoncé's *Renaissance* show in Cardiff. ("I could see her sweating," Gatwa recalls mistily.) Groff is just one of the stars due to appear in the new season, alongside *RuPaul's Drag Race* winner Jinkx Monsoon and the *Luther* star Indira Varma.

Even while fighting goblins and figuring out Ruby's heavily teased origins, Gatwa is finding ways to keep himself busy. He plans to get into producing — "Margot [Robbie, who produced *Barbie*] taught me well," he winks — and he's clearly having a ball on the red carpet. Who can

**'I grew up feeling like fashion was armour. I like things that have a little edge of kink to them'**

forget that abs-baring metal breastplate by the up-and-coming Brit designer Cameron Hancock that Gatwa wore to the Vanity Fair Oscars afterparty? "I grew up feeling like fashion was armour," he explains. "I like things that have a little edge of kink to them, a bit of sex." Once, on a shoot, he joked to his PR that he couldn't understand why he felt out of sorts: "And I was like, oh, it's because I'm fully clothed. Ha-ha-ha!"

There's that laugh, which sounds like bottled, fizzy happiness. Then again, can you blame him? *Doctor Who* performance anxiety aside, Gatwa has a lot to be happy about. ■

*Doctor Who* is on BBC1 on Saturdays, with each episode available to stream earlier on iPlayer from midnight