



"THERE'LL BE A WHOLE WORLD OF DOCTOR WHO LIKE THE MARVEL UNIVERSE!"

Two of the most affecting moments in the episode occurred when you and your Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) finally had their moment and, of course, the incredible 'support group' sequence. What were they like to film?

The scene between me and Sylvester in the cave was so poignant and special, because back in 1989 we had just walked off into a bush at the end of *Survival*. We both felt it was so kind of them to do that for us. The 'support group' scene was rather like a dream, and I did finish the day and got back and thought "Did I dream all that?" - all those classic characters together. It was lovely because we had a fair bit of time setting up and stuff, and even before we were driven to the location where we were filming, there was me, Bonnie [Langford], Katy [Manning], and Jemma [Redgrave] all sitting around on the steps of our trailers chatting away for hours. We got there and Jodie came down especially even though she wasn't even in the scene, because she wanted to be there. It was great having John Bishop on set as I hadn't met him before; he was absolutely lovely, and of course, it was brilliant to have Bradley Walsh, too. I'd had a day filming with him in the caves and I'd met him years before, so it was great to catch up with him. But I'd never met John Bishop and he was so lovely with William Russell [returning for the first time since 1966 as Ian Chesterton] because he's elderly and frail but John was so gentle with him; you wouldn't

necessarily expect it of him because we're used to seeing his comedy. He really is such a lovely gentleman.

Moving away from the TV show itself, you've become quite heavily involved with Keith Barnfather's Reeltime Pictures over the last few years. How did you and Keith meet up?

I first met Keith when I did my *Myth Makers* video with him [Reeltime's series of interviews with *Doctor Who* cast and crew]; it was probably late '80s when I was doing the show, or maybe early 1990s, and we get on really well together. I've always had a lot of time for Keith, he makes everything very lovingly because he knows what the fans want because he's a fan himself. He shoots very quickly, which I like as I don't like hanging around [laughs]. We're on the same wavelength, we get each other.

And, of course, Reeltime has now given you the opportunity to present several of their new productions.

I used to do a lot of presenting in the '90s so then I started presenting stuff for Keith and I love doing to-camera stuff as well as acting - I'm lucky to be able to do both - and I think Keith realised that as we can work together really easily. I have connections with the people I worked with back in the 1980s like [director] Andrew Morgan and, obviously, Sylvester, I already have these relationships with people. Earlier this year, I interviewed Kate Eastaill who

was John Nathan-Turner's production secretary, and nobody really knew her but, of course, I had a relationship with her already so she felt immediately at her ease and it ended up being basically like having a chat. I also have a very vivid memory of my time on *Doctor Who*, because it was my first TV. My brain was young, I was taking it in. A bit like when you're on a holiday and you're taking in so much information because everything is new - that's exactly what it was like for me on *Doctor Who*! I do have a very good recall of what I felt, what it was like, and what happened. So when I start talking to people about it, those memories come back for me, but they also come back to whoever I'm talking to. I'm always fascinated to hear people's memories and I think that's why it works so well. With somebody like Andrew Morgan [director of 1987's *Time and the Rani* and 1988's *Remembrance of the Daleks*], I didn't really know that much about his time before or after *Doctor Who*, but it's fascinating to hear that he knew Colin Baker really well, and that he was good friends with John Nathan-Turner. He has great anecdotes about his time working on TV in an age that's now sadly long gone. With Kate, it was all about what it was like being a production secretary for John Nathan-Turner; I had no idea what that was like or that she'd been in the *Blue Peter* office before, so she was used to handling fan mail because of the volume of letters that show used to get in.

You've also been presenting the hugely popular *Doctor on Display* DVD releases focusing on the history of *Doctor Who* exhibitions and working alongside Reeltime's regular interviewing team. How are you finding that collaboration?

I just do whatever Keith tells me! We're always up for an adventure. He'll ring up and say, "What do you think about going up to this tiny little *Doctor Who* exhibition in Allendale in Northumberland?", and I'll go, "Yes, all right then!" And off we go! Keith will ask me to do something and I know it'll be really good fun, so I'm now really close friends with Neil Cole [who set up and runs the Museum of Classic Sci-Fi in Allendale] and his family. Keith's got this great team of people around him, his wife Anastasia is a very talented filmmaker herself but his interview team includes Robert Dick, who is just brilliant - he researches stuff for me and he sends it to me, which is really kind of him because he could just say, "Go and do your own notes!" There's also Ian Kubiak who's come onto the team - I've known him for years, since he was a little teenager watching me and Sylvester, and now he's grown up and running his own events. He's a very good interviewer as well. Keith's got this great team around him, he's been working in TV and production for years, so it's always fun, professional, and interesting.

Finally then, back to *Doctor Who* on TV. With the sixtieth anniversary approaching, what are your hopes for the future of the series, and would you be up for another return for Ace?

I'd come back like a shot! I was terribly jealous of Bonnie [Langford, returning to her role as Mel in the upcoming fourteenth season starring Ncuti Gatwa], and I've been in touch with her. She's had a wonderful time and I was particularly jealous of the fact that she got to ride this little orange Vespa, as I was cast because I could ride a motorbike but I never did! My hopes for *Doctor Who* are that with this wide distribution around the world, that it's going to be even bigger and there's going to be even more content created and there'll be a whole world of *Doctor Who* like the Marvel Universe. I'd love to see it extend in all directions. We had *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* back in the day, and it'd be wonderful to have an equivalent of that for the future.

Well, Russell T Davies was ahead of the curve last time in creating a mini 'shared universe' and he's spoken of wanting to do something even grander this time around. Are you ready for *The Adventures of Ace* if it comes your way?

That'd be wonderful! I can't wait for that call if it comes!



STARBURST

Wicked

BY
PAUL
MOUNT

For the last couple of years of the classic series of DOCTOR WHO, television's tireless Time Lord (in his Sylvester McCoy incarnation) was accompanied on his travels by the lively, explosive Ace, played by TV newcomer SOPHIE ALDRED. Over three decades after her last proper appearance, Ace returned - older, wiser, but no less explosive - in the 2022 episode THE POWER OF THE DOCTOR, the feature-length conclusion to Jodie Whittaker's tenure as the Thirteenth Doctor. But Sophie herself has remained close to Doctor Who ever since the original series ended and now presents and interviews for Reeltime Pictures' ongoing series of Who-themed DVD releases. Here, in a conversation that can only be described as 'ace', she tells STARBURST about her joy at returning to the show on TV and her involvement with Reeltime...

STARBURST: Your character Ace made her triumphant return to TV last year, but you've never really left Doctor Who behind, reprising the role for Big Finish, appearing at conventions, and more recently presenting for Reeltime Pictures. What was it like getting the chance to recreate Ace on screen after all this time, and what has the reaction been like?

Sophie Aldred: It's been out of this world right from the moment that *The Power of the Doctor* was announced. The unbelievable outpouring of love and affection for the character has been extraordinary. It's people like Reeltime's Keith Barnfather who have kept that all alive and enabled that to happen, because Reeltime and Big Finish were keeping it all going when nobody else was interested. The BBC wasn't interested, and we really have them to thank in so many ways. If it hadn't been for all the fan-produced stuff in the time that *Doctor Who* was off the TV, then who knows if Chris Chibnall would have been so keen to have Janet [Fielding] and me back?

How did your return to the show happen, and what was it like being back on set more than three decades later?

My agent called and said that I'd had an availability check for *Doctor Who* made on me, and I finished the call and burst into tears! It was what I'd always dreamed of, to actually come back on TV, and I stepped back into it as if I'd never

been away. We don't have rehearsals anymore for filming - although we didn't realise it back in the old days, it was such a luxury because you got to know everybody really well, you got to experiment, you got to try things out. Nowadays, you just get chucked in on the very first day of filming! It was so lovely because one of the crew said, "Welcome back, Sophie Aldred!" and everybody applauded. That felt really lovely to me, because I didn't think they'd know who I was! But they

couldn't have been nicer. The director of the episode, Jamie Magnus Stone, was absolutely lovely as well. We were on the same wavelength. It was really quite surreal but what I kept thinking of all the way through was the fans, and particular fans that I know, and thinking, "Oh they're going to love this bit", and it was so exciting to imagine the surprise it was going to be. I knew that the fans of the classic series would be thrilled and delighted to have us back, so that's what was always in the forefront of my mind.

Were you at all worried that the secret of your return - alongside Janet Fielding as Tegan - would get out, bearing in mind the show's active fan network?

Actually, I was very proud of the people who kept it a secret, because that must have been difficult as there were so many cast and crew on the production, and people who knew exactly what we were filming, and that we were around, and then also fans who kind of got to know as well. A couple of people came up to me at conventions and told me they'd found a piece of paper by accident at the place they were working and they'd figured out what it was and I said, "Thank you for keeping it all a secret." It really was a surprise for people, and in this day and age to be able to keep that sort of thing under wraps with social media and everything, I think it's brilliant that we got away with it!



"SINCE THE POWER OF THE DOCTOR CAME OUT, I'VE GOT NEW FANS RELATING TO ACE!"

Ace has been in your life one way or another for over thirty years. What keeps the character interesting for you and the audience after all this time?

I think it's just that she's so realistic and people can relate to her. She's a flawed human - like we all are - and she wears her heart on her sleeve. She's not backwards in coming forwards in telling people what she thinks about them; she's very open emotionally. People call her feisty but she's actually very vulnerable too, so she displays the full range of emotions and I think that's what appeals to the viewers. It's amazing, but since *The Power of the Doctor* came out, I've got new fans - young women - relating to her even though I'm an older woman now. They hadn't seen any of the classic series, but they really love the character. I love playing her because she's so up for anything physically, she shows that there's no limitations for women as far as all the brave things that she does are concerned, because women are brave! I added the bit where she jumps off the parapet and said, "*You used to be good at this*", as I wanted to show that she can feel fear, but that she confronts her fears. I think we all have to do that on a daily basis, whether we want to or not.

You mentioned the physical side of the character. In the classic series, Ace was always demolishing Daleks and smashing up Cybermen. What was it like getting back into Ace's fearless physicality?

I loved it, it was great! It was so much what I'd hoped for. I saw that on the first day, the call sheet said 'stunt double' for me and 'stunt double' for Janet and I was a bit disappointed, but after the first day that disappeared, and we didn't see any of that again! Jamie realised that I was up for doing my own stunts and, in fact, I relished them. There was a bit where I had to go whizzing into the TARDIS on the parachute and he came up to me that morning with this back-of-an-envelope drawing and said, "*Do you think that you could lay on a plank and we push you really hard into the Tardis - do you think you could do that?*" and I was, "*Yeah, that'll be great!*" The crew thought I was off my rocker, but I think Jamie understood why I wanted to do it!

