



SONIC YOUTH

You may not have noticed, but there's a new fella in the TARDIS. Matt Smith tells Nick Setchfield what the biggest part on TV means to him

Matt Smith gives a regretful glance at a virtually drained bottle of mineral water. "I wouldn't mind just using the bathroom," he confides. "I seem to have drunk the majority of that."

And with a grin he's gone. His exit triggers a tangible shift in the room's charisma level. There's something genuinely enchanting about this chap, with his gangling frame and fidgety digits and explodo-hair. Something quirky, mesmerising, magnetic. It's hard to imagine him as the professional footballer he dreamed of being – all too easy to see him as the tweed-jacketed action-boffin he's just become.

A back injury put paid to the soccer. A career-swerve into acting found him in the National Youth Theatre, then snatching TV gigs in *The Ruby In The Smoke*, *Party Animals* and *Moses Jones* before his off-centre charm won

the eye of those casting the Eleventh Doctor Who.

And now he's back in the room, and ready to share his love of Patrick Troughton, the truth behind his mad, twirling fingers and just what it's like to be chosen to play the greatest role in television...

How did your world change that Saturday back in January 2009,

Matt Smith: a shining example to young actors everywhere.



when you were announced as the new Doctor?

God... well, I was in Brazil. It changed for my parents quite significantly that day. The nation's press! But it's changed subsequently, quite hugely. I've moved up to Cardiff and I get to go and be the Doctor every day, which is just glorious. It's a great privilege, really. And obviously there aren't many parts where a) it's announced like that and b) your life changes in a public sense as much, because obviously the show is so well loved and so widely received that people are aware of it. Of course, it's changed. It's changed in the way that I now fight aliens every day! Aliens that aren't actually there in front of me... Often you're looking at a ball of string and some guy, and that's meant to be some sort of horrible demonic creature from the gallows!

Did it feel odd that people were already recognising you for a part that hadn't even been on television yet?

At first it's different, it's just different. I wouldn't say it's odd... it's a new thing in your life, and like any new thing you learn to deal with it. But it's one of the only parts that would do that. It's the enormity of the show, it's the brilliance of the show. It's him, it's that part. It's something you adapt to, and people >>

DOCTOR WHO





Matt Smith will have to get used to being smiled at by children...



Filming opener "The Eleventh Hour" back in October 2009.

generally are very lovely and very nice. "Are you the new Doctor?" "Yeah!" You sort of do the business and sign something and have a photo. And kids come and watch you while you film as well. It's lovely, really.

Do you feel the scrutinising gaze of the fans, the hardcore?

In what sense? In the work sense or the literally walking down the street sense?

In every sense...

I think the hardcore fans will always scrutinise this show, as is their right and as they should. It's part of what makes it so special, that it has this following who are so dedicated to it. I turn up and try and make it as brilliant as I can every day, you know, via me and my stuff.

How did that first screen test feel? Did you know that you'd nailed it?

Well, my agent rang me. I was in my bedroom and he said, "Do you want to go and audition for the Doctor in Doctor Who?" "Yeah, why not?" So in I go. It was all very secret, in a hotel. It's all mad. There's no other casting like it. I did my best, as I always do, tried to be brave in the audition and all the rest of it. And then I went for another one, which was in a different, plusher hotel, and there were a few more people there, looking beadily on. But it's funny. With most actors the ones they think they've done brilliantly in they never get, and the ones where they go, "I'm never going to get it," they get. I don't know what this was. I was pleased with the way I prepared, I thought I gave a good account of myself, which is always what I try to do in any interview. You've just got to do your best.

Could you ever have said no when it was finally offered to you? Because it's so much more than just another television role.

That's a good question. Prior to doing it I probably would have thought, "Well, I'll really consider it..." But when they rang me up and said, "Do you want to do it?" my heart spoke, not my head. Yes, done, sign me up. And also the part's so great... he's brilliant, he's a brilliant man. He's the cleverest man in the universe. He's got two hearts! And he has two hearts because he has such heart and such courage. I read the first episode, which is the one I auditioned with, and it's a brilliant

piece of writing. Steven's written a magic fairytale.

Moffat has a reputation for scares. And for comedy, too. Does that side of his writing appeal?

Yeah, he does that stuff so well. Steven's one of the few men in the world that I roar out loud to. I find him incredibly funny, and he's so bright, and again it's that fairytale he taps into so well. And he knows the show so well. There's the most amazing picture of him in his house - he won't mind me telling you this, I'm sure... [rethinks] oh, I don't know... [rethinks] oh, he won't mind! - and he's got this Doctor Who book and he's six. And he's a little version of Steven. He's tiny and he's this mad, wacky kid. And everyone else is sort of swimming around in the swimming pool. And he's there, and he's got this Doctor Who book. You might know the book! The show is so ingrained in him, and he's been waiting to write this for 40 years. It's his dream, dream job, as it is for so many of us, to be honest.

Was David Tennant there when you actually filmed the regeneration?

Yeah, one in, one out! That's what it was, literally. I came in the TARDIS and he came out the TARDIS.

What was that like emotionally?

God, it was a totally mad day. I've never been on a set like it. There must have been about 60-80 people there. And then you do your scene. But it's thrilling... it's the regeneration! I get one of the classic moments in television! That's what's amazing. And then you get the TARDIS, and then you get the sonic screwdriver, and you meet old monsters and so many great new monsters. Every day you're just faced with all these... It's unlike anything I've ever made. It's thrilling, it's thrilling. But it's tough - it's a hard show to make because it's very ambitious.

"Doctor Who is unlike anything I've ever made. It's thrilling. But it's tough - it's a hard show to make because it's very ambitious"
Matt Smith

Did David give you any advice?

Yeah, we talked about his experience. We talked and I tapped his brain. More about practical things, really. And, I'll be honest with you, about the public side of things, and how that changes your life and affects you. He was very helpful. He's a lovely man, David.

Have you ever met any of the other Doctors?

I've had dinner with Peter [Davison], at Steven Moffat's house, which was very exciting, and we talked all things Doctor Who. And we got his toy out! Which is a collector's item, apparently. So that was fun. I've never met Chris

I've seen Chris, in Manchester, walking down the road, when I was doing a play there. It was only my second job, I think. And I thought, "Oh, that's Chris Eccleston!"

Have you seen your own toy yet?

I have. I'm pleased! I filmed it for Doctor Who Confidential on my video camera. I don't know how to explain it to someone. What would you do if you saw a tiny little doll of yourself? You'd sort of marvel at it for a bit and go,



"Wow, that's cool!" It's a privilege of the job. I feel very privileged to have this part.

And are you anxious what people think about you?

I think every actor would probably say yes. Because actors are incredibly vain and incredibly tender! I go to work every day and try to make the best choices and the most inventive choices via my truth and my personality and my soul. I try my best. I make those choices now, so whatever happens when it's out is whatever happens when it's out. I can't control that, and therefore I won't let it affect me privately.

Is there a huge pressure following someone who's been so successful?

You know, this show has been a huge success. And I suppose yeah, at some point you contemplate that it has been so big. And he's been so fabulous, hasn't he, David? But the part takes over. It just becomes about learning your lines and what you are going to have for breakfast. It's really so thrilling to play, and it feels like it's in me now, so it's my version of it. I hope to play it in a way where people continue to enjoy the show, because that's what's great about *Doctor Who* –



Churchill and Daleks! Just how brilliant is this show?!

it's enjoyable, it's for the whole family, it's just thrilling. Does that answer your question? Or does it dance around it a bit?

Have you explored the history of the show?

I've obviously watched Chris and all of David's, and I quite like Patrick Troughton. *The Tomb Of The Cybermen!* He does this brilliant thing with his hands.

And he has a bow tie as well, just like you.

Yeah, he did have a bow tie, he did, he did! I think he's rather marvellous, Patrick Troughton. But it's so clever. It's just such a clever visual

conceit. Whoever thought of it... we have this show that can go to any universe, any place, any time, and this one person can continue to be reinvented in whatever direction he or she chooses.

Have you taken any bits from your predecessors' performances?

No. Well, maybe when you watch it you'll say, "Oh, there's a bit of Pertwee," or whoever.

No Troughton hands, then?

Oh yeah, I do that! It's just my hands... I do that a lot with my hands! And it's because he's a thinker as well. The Doctor is a real thinker. And me, with my personality, when I think, I do that [twiddles fingers]. And it's my personality that's coming across on the screen via this wonderful man.

How does it feel to be facing up to the Daleks?

How thrilling. The Doctor and the Daleks... again, it's one of the great romantic brilliances of *Doctor Who*. What a great war, what a great battle, this great war over time... It's so epic in scale and so rich. So for me as an actor, it's thrilling, utterly thrilling.

People fret that you're going to be the youngest Doctor. Do you worry about that?

The great thing about the Doctor is that it's a body. It's a vessel, essentially, and he is the same man. He always has been the same man via a load of different personalities and make-up and limbs and everything else. No, that's not something that concerns me at all. I'm just privileged and thrilled to be playing him. To me it's just a brilliant part. Of course there's such history that you can dip into with the Doctor as well. There's a great sea of knowledge out there. It's like anything you've got to start with the scripts you have. It always comes from the scripts, and I have a particular process of working – which I won't bore you with – and I did that again. And so much of the Doctor is instinct and personality and your energy and tapping into that... it's like Hamlet or someone. Is it the greatest part in British television? Certainly one of them. I feel very proud. It's a huge joy in my life. **SFX**

Doctor Who is transmitting on Saturday evenings on BBC One.



Umbrellas wanted in second story "The Beast Below".