



Benjamin Smith, Ida Swafford, Crystal Guillory and Patrick Degan add new dimension to fan clubs. PHOTO BY BEVIL KNAPP

The strange and lively devotees of TV's Dr. Who

By **LILY JACKSON**
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Fan clubs may not be what they used to be, but fan club fervor still beats in the hearts of some: Just drop by a certain apartment complex rec room some Saturday afternoon.

Appearing from all sides will be people dressed . . . well, strangely in home-made Edwardian frock coats and catch-as-catch-can calico dresses ("tasteless and tacky" explain the wearers with a certain amount of pride.) It's a gathering of the "Companions of Doctor Who."

And who is Dr. Who?

He's the title character of a BBC program that has attracted a devout band of followers. These

people can relate every episode, know every character and often can identify the smallest name in the credits. They can even remember the names of the various actors who have portrayed Dr. Who at different stages of the shows' 23 years.

"It's escape into a fantasy world," explains Cheryl Duvall, who with husband Charles is a club member of long standing.

This is not an laggard group. When their favorite show was threatened with cancellation, they protested at the local television station. They staged a convention in New Orleans, which attracted thousands of Dr. Who fans from all over the country.

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They even built their own TARDIS to get into the mood.

That, of course, "is a vehicle for traversing time and relative dimension in space, used by Dr. Who and his cohorts to travel

through space," the entire club explains in unison.

There are 12 Dr. Who fan clubs in this country, says Duvall, with more than 1,000 active members. The largest is now headquartered in Atlanta, which has out-Who-ed the Crescent city.

They meet monthly, their business meetings are short, their dues nominal, "but we sure have a lot of fun," says Duvall.