



WHAT KATY DID NEXT

IT'S BETTER THE SEA DEVIL YOU KNOW FOR RETURNING DOCTOR WHO STAR **KATY MANNING**

WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

MOMENTS BEFORE JODIE WHITTAKER regenerated into David Tennant (what?!) in the *Doctor Who* BBC centenary special, fans were treated to a very special, and quite unexpected, coda. "It was the one secret that didn't get out," smiles Katy Manning. "Nobody knew."

The Doctor's loveable UNIT lab assistant and, latterly, globetrotting environmentalist Jo Jones (né Grant) was back, and this was no happy accident. Fandom partied like it was 1973.

"You learn to keep secrets in this business," Manning tells *SFX*. "There are all these different [Big Finish] audios that I did a long time ago and I'm unable to talk about them. It's hard. I did one with Sir Derek Jacobi and I don't think it came out till 18 months later. A lot of people then said, 'So that's what you were doing!' You have to forget you ever did it."

When it came to "The Power Of The Doctor", the highly publicised return of Jo's fellow time travellers Tegan (Janet Fielding) and Ace (Sophie Aldred) was a convenient diversion. "I would say how wonderful and excited I was for the girls and how terrific it all was – but I couldn't say anything about my role. People kept saying, 'Are you coming back?' I went, 'No!'"

The whole universe (and her dog) are now privy to the support group that Jo attends alongside her fellow TARDIS travellers, spanning the series' very first episode to the current day. "It was an absolute joy to meet Bradley Walsh and John Bishop," Manning says. But her "absolute touching moment" was with

William Russell, who played Ian. "I've done conventions and get on really well with William and his wife. I loved him in *Sir Lancelot* when I was a tiny little person. It was just so touching to see him smiling. He's 98 now, and he's marvellous.

"And of course, there was Bonnie [Langford] whom I adore, and when Sophie and Janet came in – I thought, this is ridiculous, here's old Jo in her seventies having this marvellous moment. And Katy too."

Manning watched the story with her cousin and their four-legged friend – who proved to be something of a distraction. "I was so interested in seeing the girls that I kind of forgot about me. I thought maybe they'd decided not to use my moment, because it did come right at the very end. I turned away to play with the dog, as is my wont in life. I blinked. I heard my cousin gasp. And then I looked back and of course, realised I'd missed it."

So she hadn't told her cousin? "My family haven't a clue about my life at all," she laughs, "let alone about *Doctor Who*!"

Jo's cameo came 12 years after her previous telly escapades in spin-off *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, written by current showrunner Russell T Davies.

With Davies promising further spin-offs in 2024, would Manning be up for another venture into the Whoniverse?

"I think it would be lovely to see Jo pop in to help somewhere along the line, but I don't know how many people would want to see me," she mulls, before considering her character's 52-year impact.

"Jo is such an interesting character because of the years she's grown up in front of fans. For the little kiddies she's →



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KATY MANNING

granny Jo, but for the older ones she's still Jo. She's had a very long and wonderful life in *Doctor Who*; she hasn't got stuck at any age group, and that gives her a lot of legs. She would be a lovely person to have back on one adventure. Jo's such a gentle, sweet, caring person. But boy, if you cross her...!"

Until any opportunities for a return come her way, Manning will relish watching *Doctor Who* as a fan. And then, who knows? "I don't second-guess what anybody's going to do," she explains, "because you spoil your moment if you think about what's going to happen next. But whatever comes out of this will continue to be exciting and wonderful."

BABY LOVE

While we wait for any news on Jo's future, fans have the opportunity to reacquaint themselves with her past. Season nine is the final collection of Manning's classic *Doctor Who* adventures to materialise on Blu-ray, despite being the second of the three seasons she filmed. Timey-wimey and all that.

Out of the five stories featured, one – "The Sea Devils" – introduced a race of reptilian, ocean-dwelling monsters which continued to resurface as recently as Easter 2022. Manning enjoyed "Legend Of The Sea Devils" but has one quibble with her old frenemies: "I didn't feel that they were really *Sea Devils* because

“Everything's going to be beautiful for the fans, clear and wonderful... They will love it”

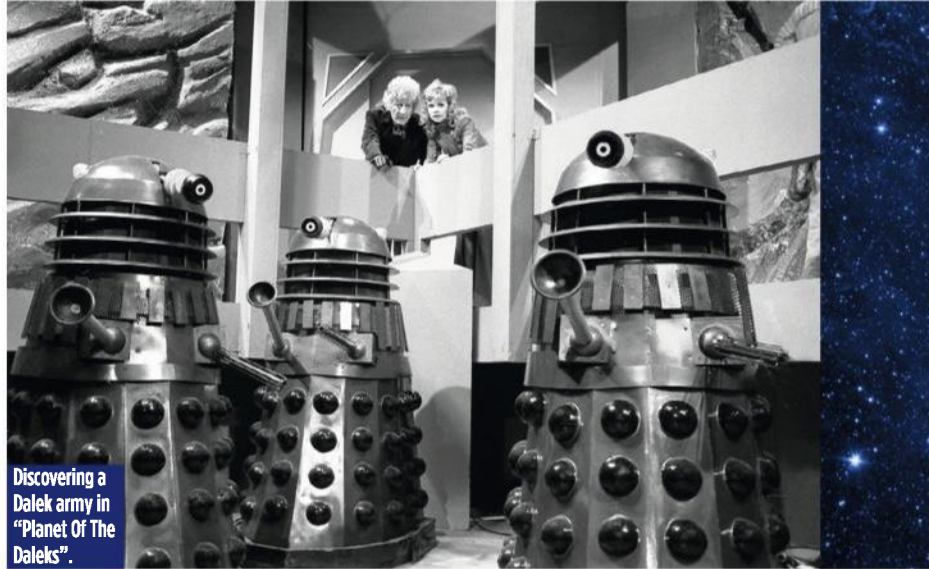
I didn't see them under the sea," she laughs, before recalling the "extraordinary experience" of watching the original 1972 monster performers wading into the icy Portsmouth waves. "The costumes were wonderful on land but once they got into water, little bits came off and you'd see the odd flipper floating about – which of course you don't see in the show?"

The story's newly remastered picture may be less forgiving – but Manning can't wait for it to be seen and enjoyed. "Everything's going to be beautiful for the fans, clear and wonderful," she smiles. "They will love it. Me, I don't even like High Definition!"

Manning ventured back to a number of her old season nine haunts – including southeast London's Chislehurst Caves – for several documentaries including "Location, Location, Location".

"We had to get to the Isle of Wight and back," she recalls of her voyage to the *Sea Devils*' motherland. "I come in on a boat! And now we've got drones, it's like an incredible travelogue. We were all over the place in three days."

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Discovering a Dalek army in "Planet Of The Daleks".



"Have you tried reversing the polarity, maybe?"

The gang's all here in "Terror Of The Autons".

While making the features she reminisced with season nine cast members Anna Barry, Gerrick Hagon and John Levene, and "The Sea Devils" director Michael Briant. "Every time I've seen them since, it's like you only saw them yesterday," she says. "There's some fascinating stuff. You hear so many stories about how it was done, what we were up against. You see the finished result, but what goes into it is always a hell of a lot more. I learnt so much."

Reunions weren't limited to friends. As part of "Defenders Of The Earth", a short film released online to coincide with the box set's announcement, Manning found herself face to face with a *Sea Devil* and its new-born *Sea Sprog*. "Seeing the baby *Sea Devil* was beyond divine," she smiles. "[Visual effects artist] Mike Tucker did such a beautiful job. I mean, who's not going to want a baby *Sea Devil*?"

The trailer was partly filmed in Bristol's "incredible" Redcliffe Caves. "You wouldn't think that there were caves there," Manning notes. "You look up and see these beautiful houses. And then we drove further on to outside Clifton where there's this really amazing beach. There's 200 steps down onto it, so anybody in the crew who'd forgotten something was going to be very fit!"

As was '70s *Doctor Who* tradition, freak weather conditions were the order of the day. "We had snow," Manning recalls. "The poor make-up lady... There's nothing you can do with the hair and the fact that you're turning blue. But then, I'm used to that – I spent years doing that."

The film was written and directed by Pete McTighe, a stalwart of the Blu-ray trailers. Manning says he was an "absolute joy" to work



With Patrick Troughton as the Doctor.



Alpha Centauri. Not suggestive.



Who stars past and present... It's about time!



NICOLA BRYANT

Manning with the late Elisabeth Sladen.



Shooting in Bristol for the season nine trailer.

with, in part for listening to her ideas. "This was always my experience back in the day on *Doctor Who*," she says, before adding: "But it was very sad to do it without Stewart."

Manning refers to Stewart Bevan, her long-time friend who played Professor Cliff Jones in season 10's "The Green Death" and her two previous trailers. Bevan sadly passed away in February 2022 – and in the world of *Doctor Who*, Cliff has gone too.

"It was important to be able to see that Jo's grown from this 21-year-old innocent, all the way through to her husband of 50 years going on his awfully big adventure. You've got the loss, but the determination to carry on in his name. It was really a lovely little piece, with love for Stewart and the character he played."

Manning and friends also watch and discuss episodes of *Doctor Who* in "Behind the Sofa", a regular feature of the Collection Blu-rays. "I love doing it," she says. "I have huge memories of all sorts of bits and pieces. There are stories of the fun and hard work and freezing cold and all of those things that go with it.

"And there were things happening in your life as well, so your memories are always going to be slightly different to fans looking at it who weren't there. We were all passionate about making it work. The whole team that I worked with back in those days was so caring. Jon [Pertwee] was wonderful.

"But I love doing 'Behind The Sofa' when it's somebody else's box set, because I didn't get to see as much *Doctor Who*, living in Australia, as

people in [the UK] did. It's a wonderful time for me to catch up and see how the other wonderful Doctors and assistants got on. It's terrific, I love it.

"So much heart goes into making these box sets from everybody involved," she adds. "Everybody wants to do the very best they can, and I think it shows."

PURE JOY

Fifty years after Jo first left the TARDIS, Manning continues to enthral her fans, just by being herself. She's a much-loved personality at conventions – and it's a feeling that works both ways.

"Every time I do one, it makes me feel so happy to see all of us, all in one place, nothing judgmental going on, just this pure joy of us all sharing something that we're all involved with one way or another. I think that's so lovely. And all the hugging. And knowing everybody, more or less. If you don't, you feel like you do.

"I find it so touching when I hear stories of people who've had some very traumatic times in their life, and this has brought them right through it. Lives that really have been changed in their living rooms by watching *Doctor Who*. We're very lucky, aren't we?"

It's pure serendipity. ●

Doctor Who: The Collection Season Nine is out on Blu-ray now.



Jo Grant and the Master: trouble.



Hiding out on planet Spiridon.