

**W**HEN BRADLEY WALSH was revealed as part of the new *Doctor Who* line-up, there were a few raised eyebrows. After all, that would be the very same Bradley Walsh who hosts ITV game show *The Chase*, one-time Pontins Bluecoat, soap star and easy-listening crooner. Not a formally trained actor, but a former factory worker who left school with three O-levels and got most of his big breaks by virtue of a winning personality and being in the right place at the right time.

Well, that's the narrative, anyway. But that simplified version of history does Walsh, 58, a huge disservice. Because actually, when you scratch the surface, there's a grafter and consummate professional who understands exactly how his industry works, and who's been busting a gut to get an acting gig like this for a long time.

"You know what's the easiest thing in my industry to do?" he asks. "The easiest thing, bar none, is to give up. I tell kids: 'Don't let anyone tell you you're too short, you're too fat, you're too thin, you're too tall. For every thousand nos, there will be a yes, so hang on in there. Who's to say you can't live your dream?' I've had many doors shut – that's why I've got a flat nose. But there's room for everyone in this industry."

**I**F ANYONE SHOULD know about persistence, it's Walsh, who's bounced back time and time again after being knocked down. His original dream was to be a footballer and he played for Brentford FC reserves before an ankle injury put paid to that idea.

Next, he tried acting but had to knock that on the head after failing to get a break. "I loved it but I was playing an extra all the time and I couldn't sustain a proper living. I remember doing *Bleak House* – I spent a day in a field with the lamb-chop facial hair and a top hat and I thought, 'Wow, great way to earn a living.' But I realised pretty swiftly, it's not as easy as that."

It was while earning his "bread and butter" at a Rolls-Royce factory that Walsh was offered a job at Pontins. On top of running their football training, he found himself working on the bingo, donkey derbies and evening entertainment, discovering he loved interacting with the holiday-makers. Always one to make wisecracks, he enjoyed the buzz on stage, which gave him the idea to try another career: stand-up comedy. Despite being a natural, that didn't work out quite as Walsh hoped, either. "I found it a ▷



#### BEHIND THE SCENES

Bradley Walsh at BBC Roath Lock Studios in Cardiff Bay, where *Doctor Who* is filmed



A full-page photograph of actor Bradley Walsh. He is standing outdoors, leaning against a dark wooden fence. He is wearing a light blue blazer over a white t-shirt and dark blue jeans. He is pointing his right index finger directly at the camera. The background shows a wooden fence and some foliage.

# ‘Every dog has his day.’

Bradley Walsh once ran the donkey derby at Pontins – now he’s the king of Sunday-night TV

INTERVIEW BY  
EMMA COX



◁ lonely old process. You're up and down the M1 on your own, living off Mars bars. You stop at the side of the road in a dark lane to find a phone box and ring everyone with your 2ps and say 'Happy New Year' and you can hear them having the time of their life and you're on your own. That's tough."

In typical Walsh style, he turned a negative into a positive: he realised his comedic skills improved his acting and he picked up some decent parts – for a short while anyway.

One of his first roles was in ITV's *The Thing about Vince* in 2000 and he was thrilled to share a set with Timothy Spall, Sheila Hancock and Peter Vaughan. "I got some good parts here and there," he explains. "Comedians make good actors – look at Norman Wisdom, Bob Monkhouse, Stephen Fry. But it was never enough to sustain a living. I was never going to win a Bafta;

## 'I wouldn't want to play the Doctor and I tell you for why...'

I was never going to go to Rada, so I kept plodding on with comedy and then I ended up doing quiz shows and game shows."

But the acting bug remained and thanks to a pep talk from Ray Winstone, who rated his acting, Walsh nearly got his big break at a read-through for *Snatch*, the Guy Ritchie-directed film starring Brad Pitt and Jason Statham. Ritchie was impressed but days later Walsh had a call to say he was being released from the movie. "They found out I'd hosted *The Wheel of Fortune* and I got let down. They thought I wasn't going to bring gravitas to the film."

That must have been devastating? "Honestly, no. I thought: 'Their loss, not mine,' because that's how I've been brought up. One door shuts, another opens. Fast-forward 18 months and I get a call to say they're doing a TV spin-off called *Lock, Stock...*, and could I try out for this part because they felt bad, and I got it.

"Tony Wood was the producer, then he moved to ITV as head of continuing drama and got me the *Coronation Street* job [in 2004]. The rest is history. Every dog has his day. You've got to keep with it." Walsh played factory owner Danny Baldwin for two years on *Coronation Street* before moving on to ITV's *Law & Order: UK*, where he played copper Ronnie Brooks for five years.

But he has carried on doing quiz shows all the while: most notably *The Chase*, which has become

a cult classic not least due to Walsh's giggling fits when contestants get answers wrong.

And he will not, he's insisted, be giving up *The Chase* now that he's aboard the Tardis. "*Doctor Who*'s brilliant and we have such a laugh on all my entertainment shows," he says. "I'm Brad on *The Chase*, that's genuinely what I'm like, and I'm not Brad on *Doctor Who*. I love both."

**T**HE CURRENT SERIES of *Doctor Who* was the subject of controversy for many reasons, from the appointment of Jodie Whittaker to play the Time Lord, to the replacement of the traditional Doctor's companion with three friends: Walsh, who plays retired bus driver Graham; Tosin Cole, who plays his grandson Ryan; and Mandip Gill, who plays Yaz.

But it has been a huge success with critics and fans alike, and viewers have reacted with particular warmth to Graham. It's a meaty role that involves Walsh flexing his comic chops with the occasional quip – he's the "everyman" in his responses to the madness of time travel – but also portraying a quiet suffering as he comes to terms with the loss of his wife.

"Grief's hard to handle," says Walsh. "Anyone that's ever felt grief knows it's not over in the blink of an eye. Someone said to me recently, 'Do you know, Brad, we watch *Doctor Who* and we've never seen that portrayal of grief for a lost one before.' It's not a very nice subject to portray but I've actually quite enjoyed that as an actor."

Walsh signed up to the role after a lunch with showrunner Chris Chibnall, with whom he'd worked on *Law & Order*. But he admits he knew little about the show, having not watched it since the days of Patrick Troughton in the late 1960s. *Doctor Who* being shrouded in secrecy as it is, Walsh wasn't told who the new Doctor was going to be, only that the latest series was going to be a kind of ensemble piece akin to *Star Trek*.

Nevertheless, I wonder whether he'd have liked to be the Doctor. "No," he says adamantly, "and I tell you for why. My style can be as manic as the next person's, but the Doctor has a certain style and, despite regeneration, I think they ostensibly remain the same type of person. And if you don't know the back catalogue and all the jargon, you're up against it. Whereas I ducked out in 1969 and for me this is brand spanking new. Besides, Jodie is absolutely fantastic. I love working with her and Tosin and Mandip. Being surrounded by these young actors – it's terrific."

The biggest surprise to him on receiving the scripts was the number of serious storylines that sit comfortably alongside the lighter sci-fi plots. "I'm a bit of a history buff," he says, "and I thought the Rosa Parks episode, and the Indian Partition one that went out on Remembrance Sunday, were extraordinarily moving. I just watched and went, 'Wow!'"

"I didn't know. I just assumed it would be as it always was, a sort of sci-fi, time-travelling



### WHO GOES THERE?

Bradley Walsh with his *Doctor Who* co-stars Mandip Gill, Jodie Whittaker and Tosin Cole



## BRADLEY WALSH THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

adventure. Educationally, it's perfect but then you get Yaz drop-kicking the alien or the giant spiders, which were terrific – it's brilliant, the way they've done it."

With two of the biggest shows on TV, Walsh is currently working his socks off. In fact, *The Chase* and *Doctor Who* were broadcast at the same time on 11 November and at one point 12 million viewers – 55 per cent of the audience – were watching him concurrently, a fact Walsh reacts to with embarrassment. "I must drive people mad!"

**O**UR INTERVIEW TAKES place partly in an office covered in food that's clearly been the location for endless meetings, and partly in the back of a car as Walsh is shepherded to another meeting across town. He juggles this amount of work with a tight-knit family life: he lives with his wife Donna, a choreographer, in Epping, Essex, and they have a son Barney, 20. Walsh also has a daughter Hayley, 36, from a previous relationship.

Every career decision is taken with the blessing of his family, but he adds that his family totally understand, as Donna is a former dancer (she was one of Robert Palmer's red-lipstick backing band in the *Addicted to Love* video) and Barney is an actor.

**BREAKING DAD**  
Bradley and his son  
Danny in their  
forthcoming ITV road trip



**CORRIE**  
Walsh as Danny  
Baldwin, facing  
the Battersbys  
back in 2006

**THE CHASE**  
He's hosted  
12 series of the  
ITV game show  
since 2009



**TEAM PLAYER**  
Walsh in the reserves  
for Brentford FC  
c1980



"Don was in the industry from 11, so she gets it," he says. "She's the most wonderful mother and wife and partner, just smashing. What we all do is look at what's the job, how's it going to affect us? It's like a company decision. It's down to them I did *Doctor Who* in the first place. I told them about the offer and Barney went, 'Oh Dad, you've got to do that,' and Don said, 'Oh Brad,

you've got to do that.' And I do what I'm told!"

Indeed, the family are so close that Walsh has filmed an ITV road-trip show across America called *Breaking Dad*, in which Barney challenges him to a series of dares including sky-diving from a plane at 12,000 feet and braving an alligator-infested swamp. "He wanted to push me out of my comfort zone," Walsh explains, "because he said all I do [on holiday] is

## 'The only thing I haven't done is a lead role in the West End'

sit around and eat ice-cream and maybe have a barbecue, which is probably true. I shouldn't be jumping out of planes at my age. I was petrified. Why would you do that to your dad? But he found it hysterical and we had the time of our lives, we really did. He's the most adorable guy."

**W**ALSH MAKES SEVERAL references to his age and his bad knees, so is he planning on slowing down a bit? Or does he still have burning unfulfilled ambitions? "I've done it all," he says. "The only thing I haven't done is taken a lead role in the West End. You've got to take each day as it comes and you've just got to thank the Lord you're still alive and kicking and doing what you love. You shouldn't have any regrets about whether you got the job or you didn't get the job. If you didn't get it, it wasn't meant to be. Your life's mapped out, I believe."

Whatever is yet to come, Walsh will always be able to say he's been a soap star, a quiz host, a *Doctor Who* companion, a radio DJ and a number-one-selling singer. Not bad for a working-class boy from Watford with no training...

"Not bad," he agrees. "I've hung on in there, that's all it is. Remember..." he says with his hand on the car door handle and a twinkle in his eye, "What's the easiest thing in the industry?" And with that he has me repeating back his catchphrase as if I were in the audience of one of his game shows: "Giving up!"