

CHILD'S PLAY

The Doctor (Ncuti Gatwa) and Ruby Sunday (Millie Gibson) look perplexed in the first episode, *Space Babies*

A full-page photograph of Ncuti Gatwa as The Doctor. He is looking off-camera with a concerned expression, holding a complex, colorful Rube Goldberg-style contraption made of sticks, ropes, and pulleys. He is wearing a blue and white striped zip-up cardigan over a dark shirt, with a necklace featuring a circular pendant. The background is a blurred, futuristic interior with blue and white lights.

‘WE HAVE
SUCH GREAT
CHEMISTRY’

The youthful new stars of
Doctor Who – **Ncuti Gatwa** and
Millie Gibson – hit it off so well
that they even talk in sync
– but do they tell each
other everything?

THE RT INTERVIEW BY
**MATTHEW
SWEET**



IT LOOKS LIKE a school detention. Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson, the new Doctor Who and his latest fellow traveller, sitting side by side on hard chairs, behind a featureless table. For actors at the end of two days of interviews, they appear surprisingly fresh. Gatwa, in a polo shirt with a chain tucked beneath the collar, shakes his head. “We are wearing a *lot* of make-up.”

They both burst out laughing. This is what happens when you let the naughty kids sit together in class. It’s their comparison, not mine – established the moment they met in September 2022, at Gibson’s test for the part of Ruby Sunday, the foundling heroine whose story is, in Gatwa’s words, “the spine of the series”.

The meet-cute went like this: Gibson, teenage regular in *Coronation Street* with an *Inside Soap* Award on her mantelpiece, arriving early, killing time in a café, then waiting nervously behind an audition room door painted a threatening shade of red. “I was bricking it,” she says, “and then I heard Ncuti’s laugh.”

‘There’s isn’t time to
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NCUTI GATWA

Gatwa, Kigali-born alumnus of *Sex Education*, already announced as the 15th Doctor, making an instant judgement about the new arrival: “We would have been trouble at school together,” he says. “That’s what I thought the moment she walked in. Huge smile. Cheeky twinkle in the eye. The teachers would have had a nightmare with us.”

The audition went well, but Gibson left in a state of uncertainty. “We had such great chemistry but then I thought, maybe he’s like that with everyone.” She received the good news a month later, at a spray tan salon. She tried not to cry off the vegetable dye.

THEN THE WORK began. Learning scripts by showrunner Russell T Davies, Gibson sometimes theorising about the plot before Gatwa had read a word. Climbing the rigging of a goblin galleon. Riding a satsuma-coloured Vespa through Cardiff with Bonnie Langford. Negotiating scenes with spacefaring babies and giant slugs. Rehearsing the waltz and the tango. An ▸

GETTY



BARBIE BOYS
Ncuti Gatwa (far left) joined Ryan Gosling and their fellow Kens at the Oscars in March

< intense shoot for former showrunner Steven Moffat's episode, *Boom*, in which the Doctor puts his foot on an alien landmine, forcing him to defeat that week's menace without budging from a sulphurous alien crater constructed in the studio. "We weren't seeing daylight," says Gibson. "We had black noses at the end of the day because of the amount of smoke on set." A whole season was finished and the next begun before the Christmas episode had even been transmitted.

"You're knackered by the end of the day," says Gatwa. "You'll start with a comedic scene, quickly move on to my best friend has just died in front of my eyes, then afterwards a quick little wildtrack of something that you did yesterday. There isn't time to be as mischievous as we'd like."

But there was time to build a friendship? "Oh my God, yes," says Gibson. "I spent every single day with this guy for months. We ended up knowing everything about each other."

So do they know each other's birthdays? "Yes," they chime.

Have they met each other's families? "Yes."

Do they know each other's politics? "Absolutely!" says Gatwa.

Enough to know how the other will vote in the next general election? "I'm only just able to vote," says Gibson. Gatwa hoots with laughter, then drops his voice to a sincere whisper. "For you, Millie," he says, "to be 18 and taking on one of the biggest roles in British TV must not have been easy. But you made it look easy. I think people often forget how young you are because of how much you can handle."

THE HISTORY OF *Doctor Who* might incline them to forget. The Tardis has whisked many teenagers into space, but only one – 18-year-old Matthew Waterhouse's doomed boy genius Adric – acted his age. Sophie Aldred was 24 when she won the role of Ace, the baseball-bat wielding 16-year-old who accompanied Sylvester McCoy in the late 80s. When the programme began in 1963, Carole Ann Ford, who played the Doctor's 15-year-old granddaughter Susan, was a married woman with a young child at home. Gibson, though, is only as old as Ruby Sunday.

"I'm so glad I was playing my own age," she says. Then she flashes a wicked look across the table. "Did you know Ncuti couldn't have a moustache because he was playing a 16-year-old in *Sex Education*?"

When Gatwa started on *Doctor Who*, his commitment to the Netflix series had yet to



CROSSING TIME
In episode two, Ruby (Millie Gibson) and the Doctor (Ncuti Gatwa) visit London's Abbey Road in the 1960s

'I know how next season ends but after that I can only guess'

MILLIE GIBSON

expire. For a short time he shuttled between both sets. "Initially, there was a conversation about keeping me clean shaven for *Doctor Who*," he says. "But I'd spent the last four years playing a child, at the age of 30, so I said, 'Let me have my moustache back.'" The body cannot grant wishes so briskly, but the make-up department can. "Bella [Arghiros], my make-up artist, would present me with a little bag of pubes every morning," he explains. He doesn't mean this literally, but he and Gibson are now laughing so much they can barely get the words out. "I went through the process of sticking them on for two months," he says.

"Trimming them," whoops Gibson. "Between every take," adds Gatwa. "As they flap off in the wind. I'm chasing a monster and the director says, 'We'll have to go again because his moustache is half off.' So when it grew back, I felt very liberated."

Being in a room with this pair is a giddy, chaotic experience.

During our conversation Gatwa tries to guess my star sign. He gets all the way through the zodiac before he gets it right. (We've established he's not psychic.) At

another he jumps to his feet and announces that he is bursting for a wee. "I'm younger than you so I can hold it," says Gibson. Bladder control, she says, is crucial to filming *Doctor Who*. "Especially when you're in a harness for a good hour."

They show no trace of grandeur. Before our interview Gatwa had ordered a sly snack between chats – a chicken and mushroom Pot Noodle. Gibson likes telling stories against herself: she booked a January holiday to get away from the UK after the broadcast of the Christmas special. She mimes dodging the paparazzi. "But it's actually been all right. I think it's because so many people come up to you in this job and tell you your life is going to change. And I think, when?"

THEY DON'T TELL each other everything, however. When Ryan Gosling took to the stage at the Oscars this year to perform *Barbie*'s showstopper *I'm Just Ken*, Gibson had no idea that her co-star would be high-kicking in the chorus line in a pink bow tie. "I was sat at home with a loved one of mine and he was the one who pointed it out and said, 'Mills, was that Ncuti on telly?'"

Has Ncuti ever sung that earworm of a song at work? "Every day," sighs Gibson, wistfully. "Every day." Gatwa ignores the mockery. He's proud, he says, to be a Ken.

Did we know, he asks, that there was a *Doctor Who* story called *The Happiness Patrol* (in 1988), in which the Tardis was painted a shade of Barbie pink? (Oh yes: it's set in a confectionery-based dystopia where insufficiently cheerful citizens are drowned in strawberry syrup by a



DON'T MISS!

Read Russell T Davies's exclusive episode-by-episode guide to the new series in next week's **Radio Times** – on sale from 7 May



PAS DE WHO
Doctor Who goes
all *Bridgerton* later
in this series

DRESSING THE DOCTOR

NOISY, LOUD AND FULL OF SWAGGER

‘Ncuti has no fear in what he wears,’ says costume designer **Pam Downe**

Every actor to play the Doctor from William Hartnell through to Jodie Whittaker has had a signature look or costume – until now. Because unlike his predecessors, Ncuti Gatwa’s Time Lord sports an entirely new outfit in almost every single episode. According to series boss Russell T Davies, it was time to give an old costuming role a makeover.

“I think the programme should be noisy and should be loud. And I knew that if you put the Doctor in a different costume, it gets more photos,” Davies explains. “It generates more coverage. And that’s proven to be true. My instincts were right on that.”

So, while Christopher Eccleston’s Doctor wouldn’t ditch his leather jacket no matter

what time period or alien world he visited, Gatwa’s version adapts to his surroundings, sporting a pinstriped suit and afro in the 1960s, and a beautiful red suit in 1813.

“I think it makes him more relatable,” says costume designer Pam Downe. “Often, he will be in a certain situation like a person would, where you dress accordingly. Although, obviously, he’s still the Doctor so it’s still a bit special. It suits Ncuti and his version of the Doctor.”

“I’ve got a fondness for the leather coat we made for him, because it was his first proper look as the 15th Doctor. I researched a lot of 70s American movies. It just gave him swagger – we knew who he was when he put that coat on and then we could go on to other things.”

“I also really love the Regency outfit on him, partly because I don’t think he’s ever really worn period before,

and when he put it on, you just saw his stance change. He was more upright and stood a bit more regally, and he just looks really good in it. There’s not many people who can pull off white, tight breeches!”

It obviously helps that Gatwa is a man the production team describe as a “clothes horse”.

“I was very interested in looking at what he wears in his everyday life on Instagram, and on the red carpet,” Downe adds. “Ncuti has no fear in what he wears.”

“He also very much wanted to be involved in the process, so I’d come up with ideas and he’d respond to them. He submerges himself in the look and shows it off to its full potential – that’s a dream for a costume designer. He knows how to wear clothes and he knows how to work it. The moment an image of one of Ncuti’s tops went out, it sold out.”

“Let me say, we cast the man for his talent, and his talent only. Genuinely,” Davies concludes. “But we very quickly realised that we had something magical on our hands – someone who could look good in any costume.”

“What should be the most ordinary costume becomes amazing. No one in the world can wear a leather jacket and jeans like Ncuti Gatwa. Somehow, it becomes more. It’s what he does with all material – not just the clothes on his back, but the script in his hands. He transforms what he’s given.”

HUW FULLERTON

state executioner with a strong resemblance to Bertie Bassett.) “Russell says to me, ‘How do you know these things from the classic series?’ and I say...”

“Because I’m the Doctor and I was there!” interrupts Gibson. “Because I watched them on my research days,” he counters. The ruffled dandyism of Jon Pertwee’s Doctor has given him the biggest kick. “I do love a bit of Pertwee,” he enthuses. “He’s always got his cha-chas out.”

The series has given its new stars a chance to do the same. *The Devil’s Chord*, featuring the Beatles and a musical supervillain played by drag star Jinkx Monsoon, puts Gatwa in an Afro and blue pinstripe and Gibson in a miniskirt and towering beehive. “We felt the hottest we’ve ever felt in our entire lives,” says Gibson.

“We were so hot,” they say, simultaneously.

“I miss looking like that,” says Gibson. “So much,” says Gatwa.

And here the past tense creeps in. For a long while, rumours have swirled that Gibson’s Ruby Sunday is on her way out already, giving way to a new companion played by *Andor* actor Varada Sethu for the next series (currently filming to air next year). Now, the BBC have announced Gibson and Sethu will *both* appear in the 2025 series alongside Gatwa. Either way, Gibson says she hasn’t filmed Ruby’s final scene yet – her day is not yet over. “I know how it ends next season,” she says. “But after that I can only guess. I might be here with a walking stick in a few decades.”

SIXTY YEARS OF *Doctor Who* have produced Tardis crews of varying degrees of intimacy. In the late 1980s, Sylvester McCoy and Sophie Aldred went clubbing after filming. Frazer Hines, who spent three years in the 60s gadding about in a kilt beside Patrick Troughton’s Doctor, also accompanied him as he delivered housekeeping money to his dependents. (Troughton maintained two families whose existence was unknown to each other.) Tom Baker’s tempestuous romance with Lalla Ward, who played Time Lady Romana, divided rehearsal rooms into opposing camps in the early 80s and is sometimes legible on screen: whole episodes go by without them making eye contact. These new successors, however, can finish each other’s sentences. Sometimes they even speak in unison.

“You get in sync,” says Gatwa. “We Bluetooth emotions,” says Gibson, in pure Gen Z. “There’s a lot of eye contact,” says Gatwa. And a bit more, right now, behind the desk.

Doctor Who launches with two episodes on BBC iPlayer at midnight on Friday 10 May, followed by a broadcast of both on BBC1 on Saturday 11 May

