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Happenings

magazine

**Tom
Baker**
of PBS-TV's
"Dr. Who"
series



**SPECIAL
CHRISTMAS
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FREE

Tom Baker

bows out of "Dr. Who" series
after seven years to move
onward and upward.

By Will LaDuke &
Mark Christensen

"Beware of actors... they are such treacherous people," claims Tom Baker, former star of "Doctor Who," Britain's longest running science fiction program. (Editors note: "Doctor Who" can be seen on WMVS-TV Channel 10, Friday nights at 10:30 and is repeated the following Saturday at 2:00pm).

Having made that point clear, Baker then flashes one of his now-trademark Harpo Marx grins and relates on how he decided to become an actor. "I was about seven or eight," Baker says reminiscing, "and I was intensely religious in those days. I was what the English call a professional mourner. At one particular funeral I was so cold and hungry that I began to cry. After the services were over, I was taken aside by a member of the funeral party and given two shillings--about ten times the amount normally given. That began my corruption!"

In Baker's case, it was a corruption which took some time in developing. As he puts it, "My life just happens to be full of pleasant accidents."

One break came when he became--for a short while--a protege of Sir Laurence Olivier. Baker cherishes fond memories of that particular phase of his life.

"I think quite a lot of him. He used to make me laugh a lot, and he invited me to ALL his parties."

It was through Olivier that Baker was able to land the choice role of the mad monk Rasputin in "Nicholas and Alexandra." It was a big break, but, looking back, Baker is whimsical about the film.

"Ironically, the film didn't really do anything for me at all. Something of a disaster as it turned out."

One role that DID do something for Baker's career was that of the villain in "The Golden Voyage of Sinbad." It was because of his sympathetic portrayal of the character that "Doctor Who" producer Barry Letts decided to cast Baker in the role of the Doctor.



Tom Baker (Dr. Who) and his assistant Romana Land (Lalla Ward) in a scene from an episode entitled "State of Decay."

"Suddenly," Baker recalls, "my whole life changed. I went from carrying bricks at a building site to playing 'Doctor Who!'"

For seven years, from 1974 to 1981, Baker was the Doctor--staying with the role nearly twice as long as his predecessors. Looking back on his tenure with the show, Baker

comments: "I liked being on the show a great deal. It was a great pleasure going in and trying to work your alchemy on quite ordinary scripts. It struck me as being a jolly way to pass the day. The days ran into months and the months ran into years. It was--I think--the happiest time of my entire life."

Why then was Baker's

departure from the show so shrouded in mystery? Was his parting from "Doctor Who" less than amicable?

"I don't think so," he answers firmly. "There was no sort of animosity at all. I just felt that I had done enough, and that it was time for me to get out and try to capitalize on its popularity."

Why then, won't Baker be appearing in the show's 20th anniversary episode?

Baker pauses, forming his response carefully. "I don't want to seem to sound immodest, but I wasn't so much asked as I was implored to do the show! It wasn't easy for me to say no. I just didn't want to get caught up in something that had already taken up so much of my life."

Seven years in a particular role has been known to tarnish many an actor's performance. In the case of Tom Baker and "Doctor Who" this wasn't necessarily so. "I just sort of stumbled through it, he says. "I drew up a list of things I believed the character wouldn't do, and sort of moved on to the next serial. When I was doing 'Doctor Who', I was usually filming five or six scripts at the same time. We were constantly fighting the clock and, quite happily as it turned out...I didn't ever know what was going on with the show."

How does Baker compare fans of the show in England to fans here in the U.S.? "I think American fans are much more open, more demonstrative.

"Whereas the British fans are much more reticent, far more reserved."

And what of the recognition factor? Is Baker put out at being recognized on the street?

"The other day, I attended a China exhibition at one of your museums," he told us. "And I was looking at some marvelous Ming Dynasty artifacts, when I turned to see three elderly women. And suddenly, there was a flash of recognition, and they started to give me a standing ovation!" Baker laughs as he relates the tale. "I was really quite touched and amused by it. And I thought silently to myself--that could only happen here in America." ■