

TELEVISION

by TONY GRUNER

ITV can expect a jolt when the BBC launches its 'Dr. Who'

THE ITV companies can expect their first major jolt from the BBC Drama Group when Sidney Newman launches "Dr. Who," a 52-week family series, on November 23 at 5.25 p.m.

"Dr. Who" is a somewhat mysterious type of programme consisting in part of fantasy and realism. But Newman is backing it as a big rating success, and in fact initiated its format.

The story is about a strange doctor, played by William Hartnell, who creates a machine which goes backwards and forwards in time as well as going outside of time.

Accompanying him on various trips is a 15-year-old girl, Carole Ann Ford, and two young teachers, William Russell and Jacqueline Hill.

But while the premise of "Dr. Who" is fantastic, the treatment of various places and periods will be tackled factually and realistically.

The arrival at the time of the French Revolution will be as historically and naturalistically accurate as the landing on a new planet or a look into the future of the world in 100 years time.

In other words while "Dr. Who" will be informative and broadly educational, it will always be full of entertainment gimmicks and the type of showmanship that is part of the Newman flair.

And the BBC drama chief will create the world of "Dr. Who" in the confines of the Television Centre. There will be hardly any exterior shooting, but plenty of work for the two set designers of the series, Barry Newbury and Brachaki.

Full resources

Newman has always deprecated the failure of producers to use to the full the resources of a live television studio, and at ABC he was able to achieve astonishing results with the aid of such brilliant designers as Tim O'Brien and Voytek.

"Dr. Who" will have at least two permanent directors, Chris Barry and Waris Hussein, and its producer is Miss Verity Lambert, who received her early training at ABC where she worked as PA to Dennis Vance and Ted Kotcheff.

Miss Lambert then went off to the States, directing shows for David Susskind, until her return to ABC early this year. In June she joined the serials department of the drama group under Donald Wilson, who has worked with Newman in setting up the project.

Producer Lambert told me this week: We think that "Dr. Who" will be something different in weekend family entertainment. We have some good writers who are experienced in working on high-class series, for this show must please adults as well as children if it is to be successful. "Dr. Who" is a strange mysterious weird old man, and William Hartnell is giving a marvellous performance in the title role. None of the episodes will be self contained, but will be grouped together into four- or even eight-part serials. Only the four characters, Dr. Who,

the young girl and the two teachers will be constant. The length of the serials will depend on the stories and locations and these will be varied in time and space.

With a perfect time slot of 5.25 p.m. on Saturday and with the full resources of the BBC backing Newman's pet project, one can prophesy with some confidence that with "Dr. Who" the BBC Drama Group should be making its first major ratings breakthrough against ITV.

And about time, too!

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ASSOCIATED BRITISH PATHE has sold nearly 4,500 television programmes to overseas stations during the last twelve months, making it the company's most successful year so far.

Chris Towle, who heads the department under Macgregor Scott, told me this week there is a greater interest and demand for British programmes than ever before among the Commonwealth countries.

One of the most important deals signed recently was for 39 episodes of "The Avengers" to be sold to the Australian Broadcasting Commission. And further deals for the series are now being finalised with Canada, New Zealand and smaller Commonwealth stations including Malta, Gibraltar, Nigeria and Rhodesia.

ABC's variety show, "Big Night Out," which is not seen in London, has also been sold to Australia's ATV commercial channel. It comprises a complete series of 13 programmes.

Both programmes are taped and have to be converted to a 16-mm. negative, for sale outside this country.

But prices for all programmes whether originally film or converted film are about the same, Towle told me this week.

He believed that a new ABC TV series about folk music, "Hullabaloo," now showing in the Midland and the North, may even be sold in the States. "There has been considerable interest in this show and the reaction in the U.S has been most encouraging, where apparently 36 million people are avid followers of this type of music," he says.

Pathe has also concluded a very big distribution deal involving not less than eleven tv film series, which will be seen in eight Middle East countries within the next 12 months. They are "African Patrol," "Dial 999," "Glencannon," "Martin Kane," "Jungle Boy," "Torchy," "Flying Doctor," "Time to Remember," "International Detective," and "Tales from Dickens."

Towle singled out two tv film programmes which had sold particularly well throughout the world: "Mantovani," produced by Harry Alan Towers, which had been bought by 35 countries in the Eastern Hemisphere, and the Pathe documentary series "Time to Remember," which had been sold to 35 countries throughout the world.

Spoof film for Tours

"THE CRITIC," a spoof of arty short films, by producer-director Ernest Pintoff and comedian Mel Brooks, has been selected to be shown at the Tours, France, international festival, which will be held from November 28 to December 2.

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