



ong before bisexual Captain Jack, lesbian lizards and the sight of John Barrowman's bare arse at Saturday tea-time, 'gay' was not a word used on or near the Doctor Who of the 20th century... at least, not on screen. "Doctor Who was always very gay," argues former star of the show, Matthew Waterhouse. "It had a gay producer, some of the directors were gay..."

For 18 months from 1980, Matthew appeared firstly opposite Tom Baker and then Peter Davison, playing Adric; boy genius in yellow and green pyjamas. A few sensitive adolescent boys, myself included, were left distraught by the character's sudden death at the end of the 1982 serial Earthshock. And as Blue Box Boy, his recent memoir of his time on the show reveals, Matthew was openly gay throughout. "I love the sense that Doctor Who, whatever else it is, is a mega-gay programme," he enthuses now. "The Wizard of Oz of TV! When I wrote Blue Box Boy, I felt it was as much 'queer writing' as it was a book about being on the telly. There's no single reason why it has gay appeal. It seems to have been there from the beginning, but Tom [Baker] – who is very much not gay – wonderfully illuminated it, I think. It is maybe difficult now

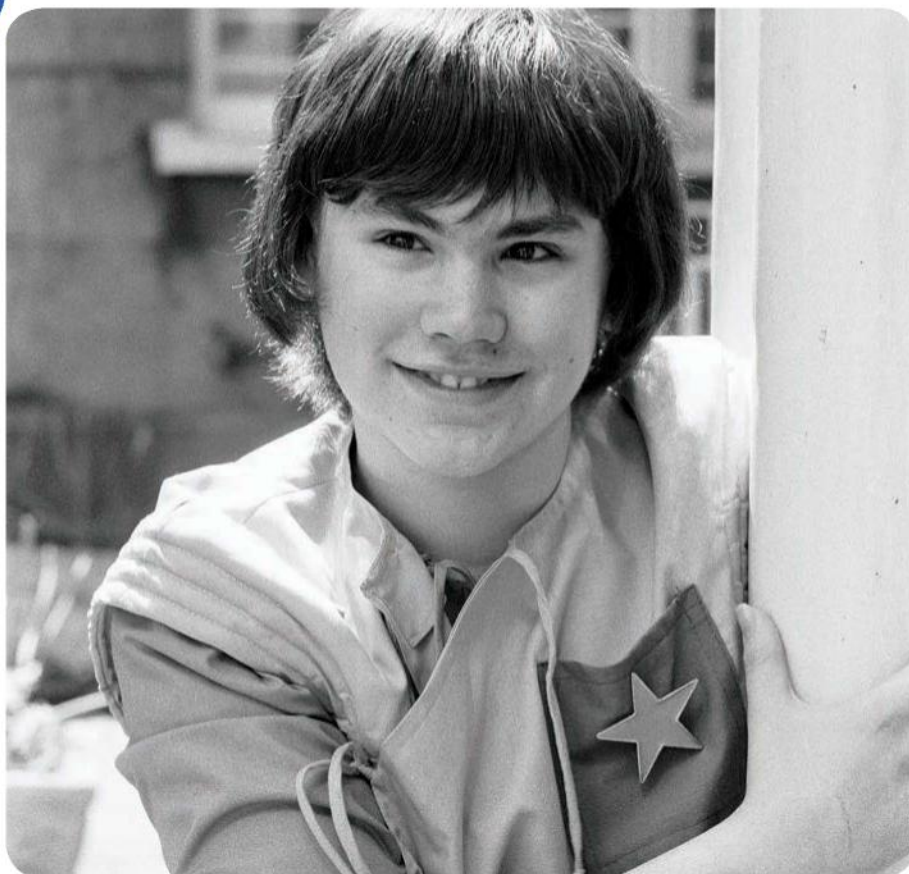
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Matthew as Adric



to understand how exhilarating he was for viewers at the time. We can overwork the word 'camp', but there is something about Doctor Who that's different from the appeal of Star Trek or Star Wars; something that appeals to a queer sensibility. It may be partly that the main character is an outsider; children who feel that they're in some way unusual maybe see a fellow outsider in him. And also, even though some people are troubled by the sexist treatment of some of the girls in the original show, gay guys do love camp girls who scream a lot! Although Doctor Who was equal opportunities exploitation, if it was exploitation at all – Adric is the most sexualised companion of my time. One director, Peter Grimwade – who directed 16 episodes with me in them – kept including long, lingering, eroticised close-ups of my arse!" he laughs. "I doubt Peter was aware of this, but I noticed it at the time. Not that I mind."

A couple of decades on, Billie Piper must have endured months of media training during her pop star days, which will have seen her in good stead through a couple of years of starring in Doctor Who and the resultant media coverage. "Nobody ever told me, 'you've got to say you fancy the ladies'," Matthew muses. "If at the time I said, for instance, that [co-star] Lalla [Ward] was very pretty, it's true – she is very pretty. But the words 'media' and 'training' didn't go together at all. I was just an actor who was put in the programme – nobody ever told me what to say to journalists." Would Matthew have liked the option? He ponders for a few moments. "You don't want to get so trained that you lose your individuality, and just become a machine that says all the right things – so media-savvy that nothing you say is real. But of course it was a very different world before the internet – probably a slightly less poisonous world..."

When the show returned to TV in

2005, the gay sensibility had moved from covert to overt – an outcome of being now chiefly written by probably the most famous gay writer in British television, Russell T Davies. Part of the furniture now is the acknowledgement of sexuality in any form – homosexuality being just one flavour. “John Nathan-Turner, the producer who cast me, had this famous phrase – which we all found irritating – ‘no hanky-panky in the TARDIS’. Doctor Who was a universe in which sex pretty much didn’t exist. It wasn’t just a matter of not having a gay character – romantic relationships scarcely existed at all. Jo Grant [companion to Third Doctor Jon Pertwee] did get a boyfriend, but only as a way of writing out the character – the same for the very first Doctor Who girl, Carole Ann Ford. Perhaps, in a strange way, it’s slightly liberating that, if Adric was a gay boy – which he wasn’t necessarily, just because I’m a gay actor – it’s something that nobody would remark upon. So, in a sense, there’s no discrimination at all – nobody says ‘I’m gay’ in the same way that nobody says ‘I’m heterosexual’. You can have a gay character and nobody reacts to his homosexuality. Whereas, in the real world, everybody would react to it, because the fact that a person was gay was understood to be the defining thing about them. Whether or not the boy Adric is queer, he’s plainly not an orthodox masculine straight male, and none of the characters are contemptuous of him for that – which is beautiful...

“It’s interesting that you say the new series has contributors who are openly gay – John Nathan-Turner was gay and wasn’t closed about it, but that probably wasn’t public information, even though nobody who had spent two minutes in his company would have been in any doubt. And in some sense the old series is actually gayer than the new series. The old Doctor Who cult was largely homosexual boys; a strange mixture of rather





Matthew now

sweet lads and the most appalling bitches imaginable. John once said that the worst of the cultists were worse than the most vicious queens he'd ever met. The Star Trek cult, by contrast, was largely female, whereas women didn't much like Doctor Who in those days – it was mainly obsessive lads. One of the other stars of the show used to say that heterosexual boys lose interest in Doctor Who when they get into girls – whereas gay boys don't get into girls, therefore don't ever lose interest in it!"

Mention of John Nathan-Turner is interesting, as recent publication of a mildly salacious biography of the man saw an apparently failed attempt by a tabloid paper to foment a Yewtree-style scandal. It was noticeable that when he wrote his own memoir of the show for the official Doctor Who Magazine a couple of decades ago, 'gay' was a word noticeable by its absence. "He was old-school," Matthew notes. "He was showbizzy, in a very end-of-the-pier kind of way, and very BBC. And the BBC wasn't as liberal as people might imagine – yes, a lot of gay people worked there, but one of the male Doctor Who directors during my time was married to a woman, because he feared being known to be gay would spoil his career."

Blue Box Boy is the memoir of someone who not only grew up watching the show, but who actually identified as 'a Doctor Who fan'. Although many more recent contributors to the show went through such a phase – Doctors David Tennant and Peter Capaldi being among them – Matthew was the first. "It's kind of cool in itself," he declares now, "having been the first Doctor Who 'enthusiast' to be cast in it. It is also cool that people who grew up liking the programme are now writing it and acting in it. When I was 18, I knew I would write about my experience of the show one day – it's a great subject, full of unusual characters. The people who made the series were unusual

and funny and wildly pleasurable to write about and, I hope, read about – and, in small press terms, the book has actually been very successful. Doctor Who is still a big part of my life. I was in it for two years, and it's been there ever since. I've never not had royalty cheques from Doctor Who, or gone to conventions – and these days I find myself working on Doctor Who audiobooks and audio dramas. This is true for all of us from the series – it's always there and it never goes away. Insofar as I'm known at all, it's what I'm known for!"

Matthew identifies as much as a writer as an actor these days, with three novels under his belt – the third, Precious Liars, will be out soon. "A decade or so ago, I moved to America to live with my American partner, and that's when I thought 'I'm ready to write'. I was still a working actor in the UK – and still am, because of Doctor Who – but in America, I didn't want to line up in New York trying to get into the chorus of Cats. And my partner was very supportive. It was a time to start trying to see what I could do with fiction. I don't find it easy, but I do find it exciting!" His three novels share a camp sensibility and a number of recurring characters. It's like Matthew's own little Tales of the City...? He laughs. "Tales of the City filtered through Cocteau and Genet and James Purdy! The phrase I coined for it is 'metaphysical camp', this bizarre version of New York. Partly it is the New York city you can walk through, and yet it's a world in which ghosts could suddenly walk across your path. One character in the new novel who I love is a boy who runs an art gallery and decides he is a Martian. Because he decides he is, he is! It's a surrealist sensibility, this comic but quite dark tone. That seems to be where my imagination takes me..." ■

Matthew Waterhouse's novels and Doctor Who memoir Blue Box Boy are available in print and on CD from whatnoise.co.uk. His third novel, Precious Liars, will follow shortly.