

CARRY ON, DOCTOR

Nobody could have predicted the huge success of the new Doctor Who, not **GT** - not even its writer, Russell T Davies

After *Queer As Folk* and *Bob & Rose*, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Russell T Davies has turned his back on gay drama. Nothing could be further from the truth, he says.

Davies is riding high at the moment. He's the man behind the highly successful comeback of *Doctor Who*, which took up nine months of his life and knocked Ant and Dec off their Saturday-night pedestal.

Apart from a one-off TV movie nine years ago, featuring Paul McGann as the eighth Doctor, the British sci-fi classic hadn't been seen since 1989, when declining viewing figures prompted its axing after 26 years. Numerous attempts in the past to regenerate the programme came to nothing.

However, the first episode, written by Davies, attracted more than 10 million viewers, a debut unparalleled outside the 70s' heyday of Tom Baker. "No-one ever expected those viewing figures," Davies admits. "No-one in even the most drunken meeting ever thought that."

As far as he's concerned, *Doctor Who* is one of the gayest of gay icons, and taking it on was a dream come true. He can't explain why he, like so many gay men, loves the show so much, but he remembers running home on Saturday evenings to catch the latest episode. His earliest memory is seeing William Hartnell regenerating into Patrick Troughton - an episode aired when he was three and never repeated since.

But while millions of viewers were enjoying the first episode, Davies was steering well clear. "Some friends asked me over so I ended up going to their house and getting pissed. We didn't watch it. The week before, we screened the first episode for the DVD trade mags - and that was the 373rd time for me. That's when I thought, 'I'm sick of seeing it'.

"But I'd shown it to my friends a couple of months before, and they really liked it."

So did the BBC. Just days after the ratings figures came through, the series was recommissioned. "I was surprised they did it so quickly, because it's an expensive show and there are a lot of other dramas to be made. There's not a lot of money to spare; jobs are being lost."

It was a surprise, but marred by the news that, though the second series had been commissioned, the new Doctor Who wouldn't be rejoining. Eccleston, it seemed, didn't want to be "typecast", although the BBC later admitted it hadn't even spoken to Eccleston when it made the announcement.

Davies' obsession with all things *Who* is something he covered in *Queer As Folk*. One of the main characters, Vince, played by Craig Kelly, is a *Doctor Who* nut. Vince would spend evenings in, reciting the words while watching his favourite episodes. Was there anything autobiographical in his character?

"Oh, quite a bit, yes," says Davies. "I wish I was that sexy, of course. He was an easy character to write because I knew what he'd go home and do. And I was sick of seeing *Doctor Who* fans on TV with long scarves, so I wanted to take a really sexy young man and make him a *Doctor Who* fan - and, most importantly, have all his friends know about it. He wasn't in the closet about it at all, he could talk openly about how he really loved 'The Tenth Planet'."

It's not just Vince and Russell. Go to any *Doctor Who* convention, and



at least a third, maybe a half, of those attending will be gay men. Davies is as baffled as anyone else over why the Doctor should be such a gay icon.

"Isn't it weird? You want to fight the cliché, but it's true. I was in Old Compton Street recently and two men, separately, came up to me and thanked me for bringing back *Doctor Who*. I was thinking, 'How gay is this?' And they were really nice, they weren't lunatics or anything."

Davies says it might be about escapism, recalling how some 15-year-olds at a youth group in Manchester, while he was researching the character of Nathan for *Queer As Folk*, all turned out to be massive fans of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

"I have a big theory - it might be bollocks - but I think gay men are highly receptive to all forms of storytelling, in a way that straight men aren't. If you put a straight man in front of a chick flick or *Buffy*, he won't entertain it for a second; he won't believe it." ▶

Words by DANIEL MARTIN

► He thinks gay men like fantasy because many of them, in their teenage years, lead a somewhat fictionalised life.

"When we're 11 years old and we start to realise who we fancy, we begin to lead a bit of a double life. There're a certain number of important adolescent years during which you're leading a secret life, where you're not giving yourselves away.

"I actually think that makes you more receptive – you watch, you think, and become aware of different levels; you can be fancying someone and never talking about it. Your conversation becomes more layered, with more

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subtexts, so you appreciate stories. Cartoons, sci-fi, thrillers; you're more receptive to fiction because you've had to slightly fictionalise yourself."

Whatever the reason for the gay appeal of *Doctor Who* past, Davies has no idea whether the new series will attract a similar following; it's not something that's been at the forefront of his mind.

"I do think there'll be a lot of gay viewers, because they're more likely to watch fantasy material. But if you write specifically what you think a gay audience will like, you're dead. Exhibit A – the revamp of *Crossroads*, when they made it all camp – fucking hell, I've never been so insulted. It was horrible."

But he comments, "We do get someone calling the Doctor 'gay' for the first time in *Doctor Who*'s history. He's moaning about just being slapped by someone and he's going on about it, so Rose says, 'you're so gay'. There we are: that's a first."

"The whole thing is set in 2005, so there's a much more open understanding of sexuality [than in the original series]. Later on, there's a second companion, called Jack (played by John Barrowman), who looks like he's up for anything. The story doesn't discuss it explicitly, but quite obviously he'd sleep with anyone."

"One of my favourite bits is where Jack thinks he's going to his death, and he does a big 'goodbye' speech to Rose and gives her a kiss, then does a big speech to the Doctor and gives him a kiss. Just a little kiss. His character's from the 51st century, so I thought, 'If we're not like that in the 51st century, when will we be?' No-one's made a fuss about it, because it's been done really naturally and it's really funny, as well."

"The whole show is stunning; it's everything I ever wanted to make. It's so colourful; so big and bold – you wouldn't think it was shot in Cardiff."

Davies wrote most of the scripts for the 13-part series, but other top writers were lured in, including *The League of Gentlemen*'s Mark Gatiss. And nostalgia for *Doctor Who* meant that an array of top-name actors accepted parts in the new series: Simon Callow, Richard Wilson, Penelope Wilton and Simon Pegg, to name a few, and Bruno Langley, *Corrie*'s former tortured gay teen, Todd Grimshaw.

"We had this part of an 18-year-old boy, and we opened the paper and it said, 'Bruno Langley's leaving *Coronation Street*'. He was almost an instant choice. He's a lovely actor, and a nice boy, as well – God, he's gorgeous. And he's very clever for a such young man; I was such a twat at that age."

Davies is well on the way to establishing himself as one of the biggest names in TV writing. While working on *Doctor Who*, Davies was also busy with another BBC project: *Casanova*, a dramatisation of the life of the great Lothario (starring David Tennant, who's now tipped to play the Doctor's tenth reincarnation).

As for the future, Davies is currently writing a Christmas special for *Doctor Who* – "Great: tinsel!" – and he plans to stay onboard for at least two more series. He's also looking forward to spending more time with his partner of six years, customs officer Andrew Smith. "Six years? Good God, you don't get that for murder. But bless him, he's very patient. He wasn't a *Who* fan, poor thing. But he's seen every bloody edit, and now he's probably sick of it."

Once *Doctor Who* is out of the way, the plan is to "go gay again". "I want to look at the lives of gay men who, like me, are a little bit older – which isn't to say it'll be dull and boring. I don't know what it is, and I've had such a short amount of time to think about it. It won't be *Queer As Folk*, but it'll be by the same production company, Red."

"I'm thinking of a nice six-part drama, maybe about couples and their relationships – I haven't done that before. There's a lot of good material there, I reckon. It's pencilled in by the BBC – it's not a proper commission, but they said they're definitely interested."

And so are we. ■