

FREE! ISSUE #9 NOVEMBER 2009 **BIG FINISH**
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VORTEX

THE BIG FINISH MAGAZINE

BUMPER TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION!

Colin Baker, Nicola Bryant & David Richardson
chat **Lost Stories**

Jason Haigh-Ellery
on **10 years of Big Finish**

Rob Shearman
on his **new book**

Mark Strickson Q&A

James Swallow on Dredd

Not one, but two Sherlocks! Nicholas Briggs and Roger Llewellyn chat to us about the Great Detective

SHERLOCK HOLMES

PLUS: Sneak Previews • Exclusive Photos • Interviews and more!

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Yee Jee Tso

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Nicholas Briggs
Dalek/Cyberman Voices
Big Finish writer/producer



Robert Shearman
Doctor Who Writer



Jason Haigh-Ellery
Big Finish Productions



India Fisher
"Charley Pollard"
Big Finish Productions

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EDITORIAL

It's a little over ten years since Big Finish started making **Doctor Who** audio drama. Along the way, we've worked on other 'franchises', and we have hopes and plans to bring many more series to audio too. My personal passion is audio drama, because I've been fascinated by sound since I was a kid. That fascination with sound soon combined with my compulsion to write stories, and the result is that there now are piles of old audio tapes at my Mum's house, full of me 'doing' audio drama from far too young an age. Those tapes will never see the light of day!

But when Gary Russell and I eventually worked together on some amateur **Doctor Who** plays, we knew we wanted to do it professionally. Gary made it all happen by getting Jason Haigh-Ellery on board, and for seven fantastic years, Gary defined Big Finish, exploring all kinds of **Doctor Who** stories, bringing on board some great writers. I was always around in the background, though, doing my 'thing'.

For the last three years or so, it's been my pleasure and honour to steer the Big Finish ship (time and space ship, naturally), but I wanted to take this opportunity to thank Jason Haigh-Ellery for being so brilliantly supportive. As the owner of the company, he is the reason Big Finish exists. And it's his trust in me and the team that gives the company its unique creative freedom. But don't for one moment think that he's just some lofty 'money man' who never gets creatively involved. David and I meet regularly with Jason and he's fully involved in the planning of stories and series, and has a keen appreciation of what our listeners want.

So this is a big thank you from me to Jason. The best boss you could possibly have.

Nick Briggs - executive producer

SNEAK PREVIEWS AND WHISPERS



The Survival of the Fittest cast: Sylvester McCoy, Evie Dawney, Hannah Smith, Mark Donovan, Adrian Bower and Tracey Childs

Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles: The Suffering

Not just one but two firsts for the series: we get our first double-disc **Chronicle** (retailing for £12.99, but subscribers to the series receive it at no extra cost - because subscribers get more at Big Finish!), plus there's an historic pairing of two companions from the classic series. Maureen O'Brien and Peter Purves return to the roles of Vicki and Steven respectively in Jac Rayner's tale that focuses on the Suffragette movement.

AVAILABLE IN FEBRUARY 2010

Doctor Who: Survival of the Fittest

February's main range **Doctor Who** release finds the Seventh Doctor and his new companion Klein (Tracey Childs) heading off to some new horizons. The release actually begins with the one-parter *Klein's Story* by John Ainsworth and Lee Mansfield, in which the Nazi scientist tells her life's adventures so far. Listen out for not just one but two Doctors, as Paul McGann guest stars as the interestingly-named Johann Schmidt. The three-parter *Survival of the Fittest* continues the trilogy, as Klein gets a taste of an alien world...

AVAILABLE IN FEBRUARY 2010

Sherlock Holmes: Holmes and the Ripper

The third release in our Holmes series, and it's an epic: a lush, full-cast drama in which Nicholas Briggs recreates his stage role as the titular detective, supported brilliantly by Richard Earl as Dr Watson. The splendid cast includes India Fisher (Charley Pollard in **Doctor Who**) and Lex Shrapnel (**Minder** and the **Thunderbirds** movie), in a creepy, fog-bound tale in which Holmes is on the trail of Jack the Ripper. Originally written for the stage by Brian Clemens (**The Avengers**, **The Professionals**, **Bugs**), the script has been adapted for audio by Briggs himself.

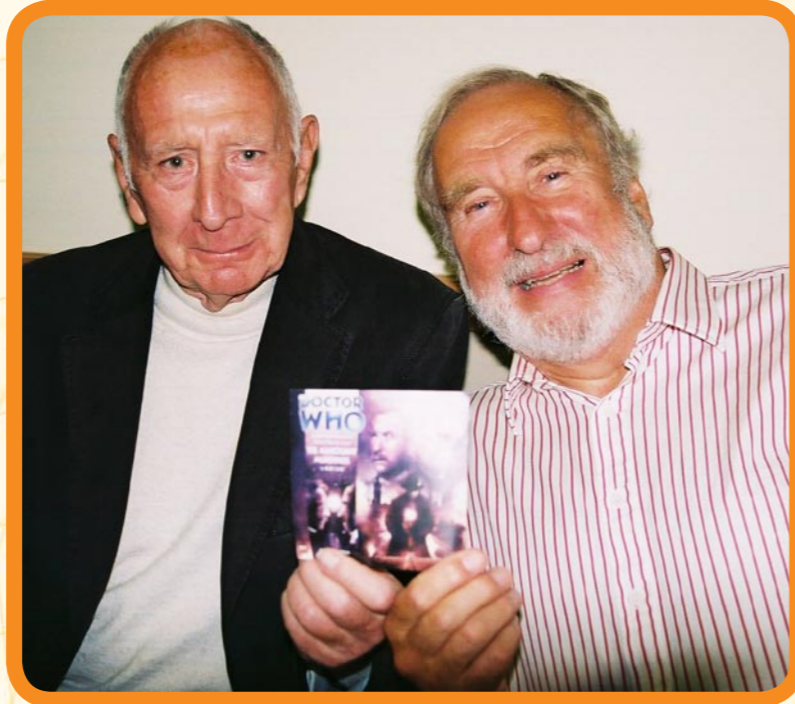
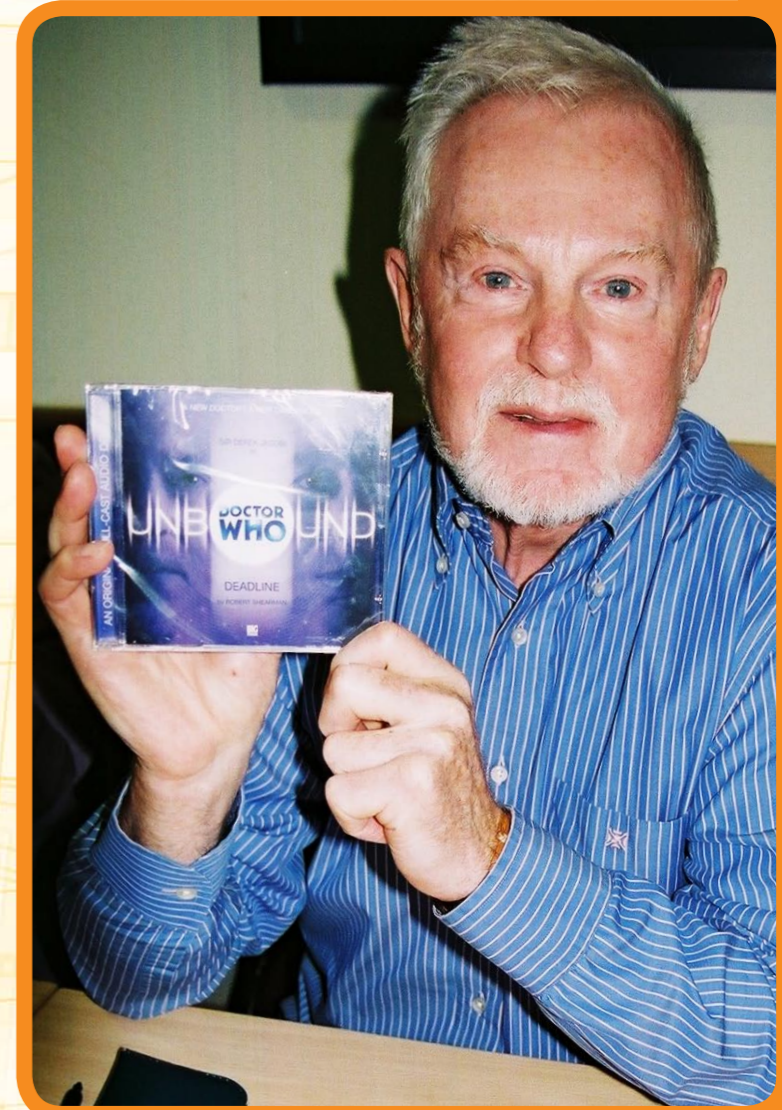
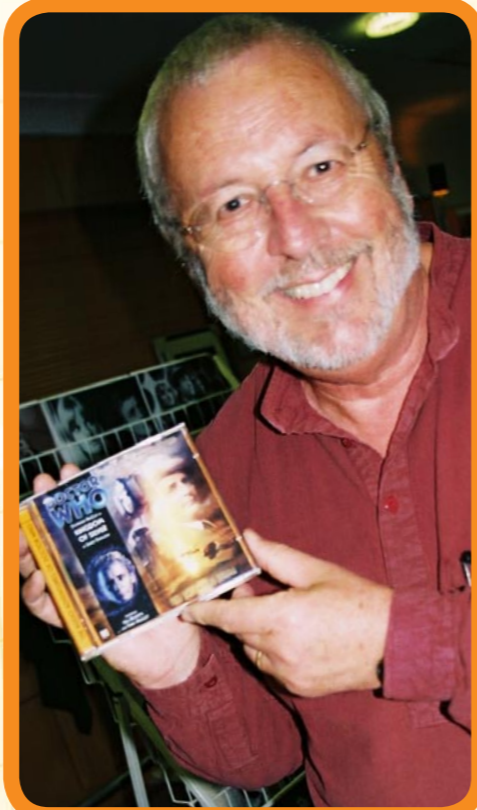
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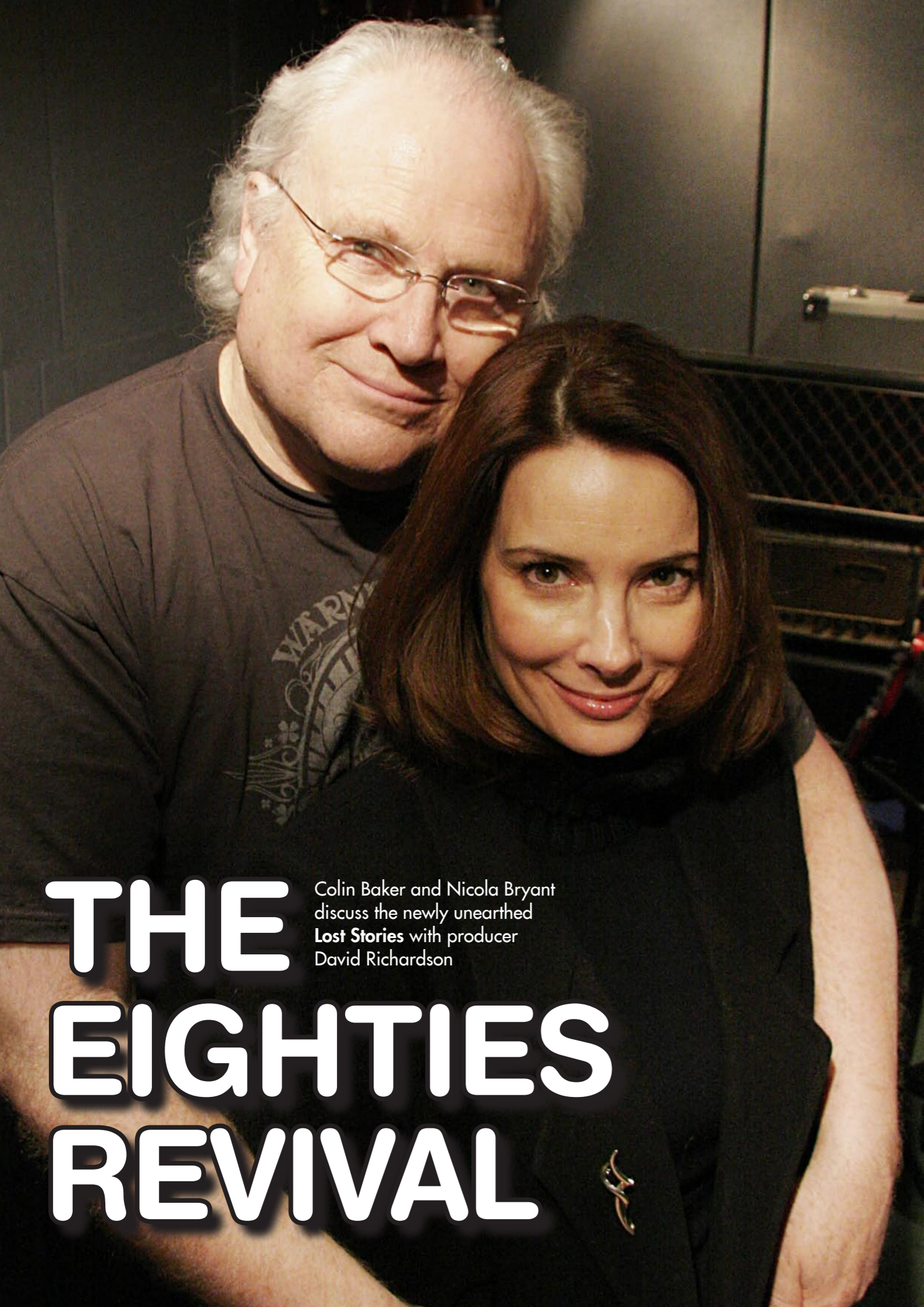
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BIG FINISH AT REGENERATIONS



Top left: Sophie Aldred with her 2009 Companion Chronicle
Top centre: Anneke Wills shows no resistance to 2009's Resistance
Top right: Terry Molloy with his 2008 adventure, Kingdom of Silver
Bottom left: The Big Finish stand does a roaring trade
Bottom right: Trevor Baxter and Christopher Benjamin

Top left: Mary Tamm keeps The Stealers from Saiph safe
Top right: Sir Derek Jacobi starred in 2003's Rob Shearman play Deadline
Bottom left: Isla Blair displays her 2007 adventure, Exotron
Bottom right: Lisa Bowerman doesn't seem too thrilled with her breakfast



THE EIGHTIES REVIVAL

Colin Baker and Nicola Bryant discuss the newly unearthed **Lost Stories** with producer David Richardson

What did you think when I first mentioned the **Lost Stories**?

CB: Yippee!

NB: Yeah, it was a very exciting idea.

Did you have any reservations?

NB: No! Perhaps a wiser woman might have done, but I was just seized by the enthusiasm of the idea of being able to recreate these lost stories.

CB: I had seen one of the **Lost Stories** on a trip on an aeroplane with John Nathan-Turner; he pulled out of his bag the script for *Nightmare Fair* which was going to be the first story we recorded of the next season, the one which was cancelled.

And I read it on the plane and I said, 'Ooh, I'm so looking forward to doing this' because of the idea of working with the Toymaker, which was a character I remembered fondly from having seen his first appearance on the screen. It was just a brilliant script, I loved it. So the disappointment when we didn't do it was huge. That was the only script I'd seen so that was my yardstick for the missing season. I thought they were probably all like that. I suppose there might have been a question mark that some of the unmade scripts might have been unmade for a very good reason. Thankfully, that hasn't turned out to be the case.

Did you have discussions with John Nathan-Turner about the development of your characters?

CB: It wasn't encouraged. Any conversations we had were very informal and non-committal on the production side. I guess that's a symptom of what was going on between John Nathan-Turner and Eric Saward at the time, because clearly they were coming from quite different angles so the idea of me adding a third angle in wouldn't have been welcome. I was unaware of that, I must say, at that particular time. I had no whisper that there were serious problems behind the camera. So I think from the word go it was made clear to me, and I don't know whether it was to you, Nicola, that actors act, writers write and producers produce and we don't want too many overlaps, thank you very much. The director is allowed to tell you how to play your part – so's the producer if it comes to that – so they're all allowed to tell me what to do, but the idea that I might have any input...



Colin Baker and Nicola Bryant join producer David Richardson at the Moat Studio for their *Mission to Magnus*

The reason that was given to me was that in the latter years, Tom was so much in control of the part that he had very strong opinions – and quite right, so he should! After seven years playing a part you're entitled to a strong opinion and it was a strong opinion that he was very prepared to share, on a regular basis. So they wanted the demarcation to be laid down very early on, just get on with it, and I was compliant. Whether I would have been seven years later, had I been given the chance, is a very different matter. I doubt if I'd have been any different to Tom.

NB: From my point of view, being my very first show and just starting out, I didn't think that I really had any place to do that. But being incredibly naive about how everything worked, I did sit and wait for the big discussion with John Nathan-Turner and Fiona [Cumming, director] as to the full history of my character. I was expecting to get a 10-page leaflet or something, so when I mentioned this to John, he did say to me, 'Well, why don't you write down your thoughts?' And I did, I wrote like a 25-page thesis of Peri's whole life and why she was taking off, and he took it and he said, 'Oh, that's really interesting,' and he read it and he said, 'Well, I think that's fantastic,' and he didn't say he would use it or incorporate it or anything, he just said, 'That's lovely'. It was a bit sort of 'pat on top of head' and I think that was the way I saw that our input would be treated.

CB: Some people like to have a back-story. I like to find out about it as I go along. Mind you, when you're on your seventh story and someone says, 'How long have you had the Irish accent?' you're in trouble...

Do you get more input with Big Finish productions?
 CB: Absolutely, yes. And very often I have received scripts and I've emailed my thoughts – the thoughts of Chairman Colin! – some of which people are gracious enough to say are worthy of consideration, others of which I'm given good reason why they should stay as they are. And I do care, because it's me. It isn't the Sixth Doctor. I am the Sixth Doctor. I'm doing it. And I probably don't know more about the Sixth Doctor than some of the fans, but I probably know more about the Sixth Doctor than some of the people around me when I'm working.

You also get a kind of visceral feeling about what's right to say and do, and sometimes something fights against everything you thought before, so you have to air it to see if you can find a way of doing it, and sometimes directors are able to say, 'Have you thought of this angle or that angle?' but I've never had, for instance, the problem that I had with that second story in the final season, of me saying, 'Am I torturing Peri because I've gone mad, am I not torturing Peri but

the Matrix is lying or am I doing it because I think I'm being watched?' and nobody – writer, script editor, producer – could tell me. They said work it out for yourself. That's never happened with Big Finish.

Nicola, if the twenty-third season had played out as intended, would you have stayed on the show or still left after the second story?

NB: Well, I had a three-year contract. This was, in a way, the problem, and my contract was in existence in the hiatus because we were paid a sort of residual fee. So when it came to coming back to do the final season, John and I went out for lunch and he said, 'Well, here's the problem: if you stay and do three years of filming, you will have been here for four years, so your contract will have been longer than other companions, and in fact longer than Peter's Doctor.' And so I lost my three-year contract. The money was already agreed, all three years. £15 increase for year one and £25 increase for year two. So it was all signed, sealed...

So I was very disappointed to discover that I was going to lose a year, but because I'd gone out and I'd now spent some time in the business playing other parts, there was also another part of me champing at the bit to get out and do other things. But I did find it so hard to go, to hand over. It's a very difficult thing to do. Because it is a family when it works, and when it does work, the relationships with the people you're working with, it's very, very close. It has to be.

How was it working with Nabil Shaban as Sil again?

NB: It was great. It was fantastic.

CB: Sil was one of the great characters. I suppose the greatest invented character apart perhaps from Glitz and Dibber – they were pretty good inventions. But I think Sil is the new enemy from my tenure as the Doctor who endures and that's because of the brilliance of Nabil; he's worth employing for that laugh alone!

NB: And superb characterisation. It was a well-written part when he arrived, and I loved the story, but what it was on the page quadrupled due to Nabil's characterisation. So it was fantastic to see him again.

CB: It's all down to the writers. The writers, the writers, the writers. Philip Martin: brilliant writer, creates a good character. Robert Holmes: brilliant writer, creates good characters.

And you've also played opposite David Bailie as the Celestial Toymaker.

NB: I thought that was excellent casting. He did a fantastic job and it was lovely to work

with him. He just really brought the part alive.
 CB: Those smooth, oily tones. Wonderful.

There's quite a meaty role for Peri in *Paradise 5*.
 NB: Laughingly now, I'm quite glad we didn't film it because the great thing about audio is I can wear any outrageous costume and not have to wear any outrageous costume. I thought it was very much set in its era. There were wonderful displays of Eighties sexism and there would have been the old thigh boots and the wig. I'm sure it would have been a memorable costume!

Mission to Magnus has some rather old-fashioned clashes between the sexes doesn't it?

CB: I think it's nice that we can look back on what was perfectly acceptable of its time and do some more of the same.

NB: It's good to revisit it. It is historical drama in its way; you're visiting the current thinking of that era, and that is fascinating and very amusing as we stand back and look at it.

You also suggested some of the cast. Nicola, you backed John Banks...

NB: John's a fantastic and versatile actor, which I realised as we worked together on *Don't Look Now*, and with these productions, versatility for our supporting cast is one of those main criteria, so it was great to be able to suggest him. I've been very impressed by a lot of the work that he's done, and it's worked out very well.

And Colin, you suggested casting Maggie Steed and Susan Sheridan.

CB: I did. Maggie Steed I worked with last year when we did *Noises Off*. When I was working with her I told her about these and she said, 'Oh, I'd love to do one!' and I was supremely confident that if I said Maggie Steed would like to come and do one that a part would be found for her immediately. She's just such a wonderfully versatile and particular actress; she does stuff that other actresses don't do. She's found something that really works, and predictably, she did it superbly.

And Susan Sheridan, I knew her when we were both new in the business, and she was a girlfriend of quite a well-known **Doctor Who** actor, David Troughton. We all shared a flat together in London, just round the corner from these studios, funnily enough. And even then she was called upon to play young boys and girls. She's done Noddy and all those sorts of things for years, and I know how difficult it is to get real performances in the timeframe that we have; on television you can spend weeks getting young actors to be able to give that kind of performance; in audio it's much more demanding. She has the kind of voice which she can manipulate to play children, and you can tell the difference between a five-year-old, a



Nicola's utterance of a classic "What's happening Doctor?" amuses Colin nine-year-old and a fifteen-year-old as well, she is so good. So I suggested her, and when you're suggesting a friend, it's always a risk that they come in and everyone looks at you and goes, 'What the hell did you suggest them for, they're awful'. Fortunately, of the people I have suggested, that has so far not been the case.

How will you feel when all eight **Lost Stories** are recorded?

CB: Bereft and looking for more, really! I think I might start writing some lost episodes and say, 'Oh look, I found this. John gave it to me,' and say I forgot all about it until now. Written by Colin Baker.

NB: Twelve of them.

CB: Obviously it can't go on forever, nothing can, but it's been a joy to do them and who knows? I'll bet there are some others lurking around that haven't been done this time that we may be able to do, even if we have to completely rewrite them because they're rubbish!

NB: I feel the same; it's been an absolute joy and you never want something joyous to end so, in terms of *The Nightmare Fair*, it's been a wonderful rollercoaster of emotions doing all of these **Lost Stories**, and when we come to the end of this ride, I will just want to know when the next one starts.

The **Lost Stories** begin this month with *The Nightmare Fair*



Friends and enemies reunited: Colin Baker, Nabil Shaban and Nicola Bryant

PRODUCING THE GOODS

David Richardson is line producer at Big Finish, in charge of running the company's production schedule. He's also the producer of *The Companion Chronicles*, the upcoming Seventh Doctor season which features the return of Tracey Childs as Klein, and the *Lost Stories*. He tells *Vortex* about the eight lost *Doctor Who* gems he has uncovered.

How did the idea of doing the *Lost Stories* for Big Finish come about?

I was 22 in 1985, when the BBC announced that *Doctor Who* was being placed on an eighteen-month hiatus. I remember the bitter disappointment, particularly as we'd already heard that the new series would have featured the return of the Celestial Toymaker, Sil and the Ice Warriors. And when the show returned but without *The Nightmare Fair* and *Mission to Magnus*, it felt like we'd lost a bit of *Doctor Who* history. Of course, these stories were later novelized, but even so I'd always wanted to see them realized as productions with the original actors. So when I joined Big Finish in 2007 I proposed the idea of doing the missing stories on audio.

When did you start work on the project?

I think it was July 2008; we had a production meeting in London and, buoyed by the success of our adaptations of the *Doctor Who* stageplays, Jason [Haigh-Ellery] announced that the *Lost Stories* project was a go! After getting approval from the BBC, and making sure Colin and Nicola were interested, I spent weeks and weeks tracing writers, sourcing scripts and getting it all together.

How will these productions differ from the monthly *Doctor Who* range?

Well, they are scripts for television that have been adapted for audio. We've tried to remain as faithful as possible to the original intent, although some changes (for example, removing the *Trial*

of a *Time Lord* framework from *Paradise 5*) have been necessary. My brief was that these productions should sound exactly like a TV soundtrack from the Eighties – down to the sound effects and music. They should fit in between your DVDs of *Revelation of the Daleks* and *The Trial of a Time Lord*. Also, I wanted the cover art to be similar to the best of the Target novels of the era, with stark white backgrounds. I love what Alex Mallinson has done. It's stunning.

Some of the scripts are adapted by the original authors, whereas others aren't...

Yes, but wherever possible the original author has been involved every step of the way. So while Marc Platt adapted *Point of Entry*, Barbara Clegg looked across it and gave notes. The same for *Paradise 5* – Andy Lane adapted it, and PJ Hammond was across it. Sadly Graham Williams is no longer alive, but John Ainsworth has done a very faithful adaptation of *The Nightmare Fair*, which Jackie Williams was very pleased with.

What was it like having Nabil Shaban back as Sil for *Mission to Magnus*?

Brilliant! Nabil is a lovely guy, and absolutely embraced the idea of returning to the role. It's interesting because he told me on the day of the studio that he was nervous about playing Sil without the costume and make-up. But he just captured the part again perfectly. And other members of the cast were wandering around trying to copy Sil's laugh – with varying degrees of success!

And you cast David Bailie as the Celestial Toymaker...

Yes, based purely on how much I liked him as Dask in *The Robots of Death*, I must say. We considered all sorts of names for the part, but it just seemed wrong to go for a celebrity or very well known name because I thought their fame would overwhelm the role. David loved the character of the Toymaker, and accepted immediately after reading the script. He's just astounding.

What have been the most pleasant surprises in these stories for you?

Oh, it's definitely been the chance to unearth some absolute treasures that we knew nothing about. *Leviathan*, which was written by the late Brian Finch

and has been adapted by his son Paul, wasn't in our original line-up, but came to the table late in the day. But we added it to the run because it's such a cracking story, with the most brilliant central premise. And to make Pat Mills's *The Song of Megaptera* 30 years on was fantastic – both Colin and Nicola loved the script, and it's astonishingly imaginative and filled with really vivid characters.

Any disappointments?

Only that *The Children of January*, which was in the original line-up, had to be dropped because writer Michael Feeney Callan was too busy to adapt it. But who knows? Maybe one day.

As you near the end of the *Lost Stories*, will you miss working on them?

I'll definitely miss working with Colin and Nicola on such a regular basis, because they've been an absolute joy. Both of them come to the studio full of ideas and enthusiasm, and they've remarked many times how much they have enjoyed this project. But the *Lost Stories* are not over for me. There are more to come. It's all very exciting...

Doctor Who: The Lost Stories - The Nightmare Fair is out this month



John Ainsworth and David Richardson display the fruits of their labours in the Moat studios



FORTHCOMING RELEASES

NOVEMBER

- Doctor Who – The Eternal Summer (128, Fifth Doctor/Nyssa in Stockbridge)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – The Nightmare Fair (1.1)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – Ringpullworld (4.5, Turlough)
- Judge Dredd: Crime Chronicles – Blood Will Tell (1.2)
- Sherlock Holmes: The Last Act
- Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical by Robert Shearman (Book)

JANUARY

- Doctor Who – A Thousand Tiny Wings (130, Seventh Doctor/Klein)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – Leviathan (1.3)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – Bernice Summerfield and the Criminal Code (4.6, Benny)
- Judge Dredd: Crime Chronicles – Double Zero (1.4)
- Dark Shadows – Audiobook 10

MARCH

- Doctor Who – The Architects of History (132, Seventh Doctor/Klein)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – Paradise 5 (1.5)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Emperor of Eternity (4.8, Victoria and Jamie)
- Dark Shadows – Audiobook 12

MAY

- Doctor Who – TBA (134, Sixth Doctor/Jamie)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – The Song of Megaptera (1.7)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Time Vampire (4.10, Leela)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – Night's Black Agents (4.11, Jamie)
- Dark Shadows – Audiobook 14

JULY

- Doctor Who – TBA (136, Fifth Doctor/Tegan/Turlough/Nyssa)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – Situation Vacant (4.2, Eighth Doctor and TBA)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – TBA (5.01, First Doctor)

DECEMBER

- Doctor Who – Plague of the Daleks (129, Fifth Doctor/Nyssa in Stockbridge)
- Doctor Who – An Earthly Child (Subscribers to main range only, Eighth Doctor and Susan)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – Death in Blackpool (Christmas Special 4.1, Eighth Doctor/Lucie)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – Mission to Magnus (1.2)
- Cyberman 2 (Box set)
- Iris Wildthyme – The Claws of Santa (Christmas Special)
- Judge Dredd: Crime Chronicles – The Devil's Playground (1.3)
- Sherlock Holmes – The Death and Life
- Bernice Summerfield – Secret Histories (Book)

FEBRUARY

- Doctor Who – Survival of the Fittest/Klein's Story (131, Seventh Doctor/Klein)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – The Hollows of Time (1.4)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – The Suffering (4.7, Vicki and Steven)
- Dark Shadows – Audiobook 11

APRIL

- Doctor Who – TBA (133, Sixth Doctor/Jamie)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – Point of Entry (1.6)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – Shadow of the Past (4.9, Liz Shaw)
- Dark Shadows – Audiobook 13

JUNE

- Doctor Who – TBA (135, Sixth Doctor/Jamie)
- Doctor Who: The Lost Stories – The Macros (1.8)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – TBA (4.12, TBA)

AUGUST

- Doctor Who – TBA (137, Fifth Doctor/Tegan/Turlough/Nyssa)
- Doctor Who: The New Eighth Doctor Adventures – Nevermore (4.3, Eighth Doctor and TBA)
- Doctor Who: The Companion Chronicles – TBA (5.02, Second Doctor)

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EIGHT STORIES WRITTEN FOR TELEVISION BUT NEVER MADE.
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THE NIGHTMARE
FAIR

NOVEMBER



MISSION TO
MAGNUS

DECEMBER



LEVIATHAN

JANUARY



THE HOLLOW
S OF TIME

FEBRUARY



PARADISE 5

MARCH



POINT OF
ENTRY

APRIL



SONG OF
MEGAPTERA

MAY



THE
MACROS

JUNE

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THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS

To celebrate our anniversary, executive producer Jason Haigh-Ellery reminisces about Big Finish from then to now...

This is the Big Finish anniversary issue. Can you give us a quick potted history of how it all began? Big Finish is unique. A radio production company that for the first seven years of its life didn't actually have anything broadcast on radio. It sold full cast radio productions on audio cassettes (initially) and then compact discs. For the past thirty years, the standard audio releases within the industry have either been single reader talking books or simply the repackaging of previously broadcast radio shows in a different format. When I pitched full cast productions released on audio to a couple of distributors back in 1998, having got our first license to do the **Bernice Summerfield** range, all of them said it couldn't work – that there was no market for it. So I set up our own distribution. Ten years later, with over 300 titles on our books, I'm very happy to see just how wrong they were. But the origins of Big Finish go back a lot further than the past decade.

Big Finish started with Audio Visuals – a fan project to produce new **Doctor Who** dramas whilst the show was on its hiatus in 1984. Bill Baggs and Gary Russell wanted to produce new **Doctor Who** drama, just for fun. The first story written by Gary Russell under the pen name Warren Martyn was called *The Space Wail*, a title paying homage to *The Space Whale*, a well-known lost story from that era. Twenty-five years later, and that story by Pat Mills is to be released as *The Song of Megaptera* in Big Finish's new **Lost Stories** line.

Many of those connected with these amateur fan productions went on to become involved with the early years of Big Finish and beyond. Gary Russell, Nick Briggs, Alistair Lock, Jim Mortimore and Nigel Fairs. And, of course, playing the pivotal role as the drugged up politically corrupted Kantrian Commissioner in season two's *The Maenad*... me. But let's not talk about that (no, really, let's just not talk about it).

Without Audio Visuals, there would never have been the Big Finish audio series. Audio Visuals gave us all the ability to have fun and learn. I learnt I was a bad actor, Nick and Gary learnt how to direct and produce.

Who first came up with the idea of doing **Doctor Who** audio plays, and how difficult was it to get them off the ground?

It was Gary who came to me with the idea of producing new licensed **Doctor Who** audio dramas in 1998. This was after it became obvious that

the BBC/Fox movie of 1996 wasn't going to go anywhere. He'd missed producing Audio Visuals and believed that the BBC would be willing to let the licence go out. In fact, it wasn't at that time. The BBC was still considering its options and didn't want to do anything precipitous. Still – it was a good idea. So Gary came back with another option. Why not go after a licence to produce a series around the popular **Doctor Who** book companion Professor Bernice Summerfield? She'd recently become the star of her own book range, and Virgin was keen for her to live on in other ways. In record time, *Oh No it Isn't* was recorded and produced and on sale at that year's biggest **Doctor Who** event – Panopticon '98. If you want to know more about this, then buy the new **Bernice Summerfield: The Inside Story** book – well worth a read.

Big Finish was now producing audio drama direct to audio cassette and compact disc. Without realising it, we'd done something that all the large audio companies connected to publishing houses had decided was untenable. Ironically, with the launch of the **Companion Chronicles** nine years later, we did do something more traditional – but even then we introduced a second voice, music and sound effects.

The success of the **Benny** audios led us back to the BBC and a more receptive response – what a difference a year makes. We'd proved we could do a professional job and that we could sell the product we produced. This time the BBC wanted us to do it.

Were Tom Baker, Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy and Paul McGann all approached in the beginning? Did any of them take some convincing to sign up?

We initially approached Colin, Peter and Sylvester to be our 'launch' Doctors. This was because we'd got to know them through various conventions over the years. We then tackled Tom Baker, who said no, and Paul McGann (who was the incumbent Doctor at the time), who said yes. This led to an era of 'location' recording in Bristol, where we would record four McGann production in six days – a very hard task. One year, we decided to try to record six plays in ten days. It almost killed us all, with flu rampant in the cast and crew and tempers flaring. Never again.

Were you surprised when Tom agreed to do audios for the BBC? Do you think he will ever do a Big Finish story?

Many times we tried to convince Tom to come back and play the Doctor – many times we came close. But there was a reticence for Tom to return to the role. It's good to see him doing *Hornet's Nest* for the BBC – who knows what could happen in the future?

How have the other ranges come into being?

Doctor Who led on to other audio licenses. I've always built companies and it was a logical thing to do. Initially we built from within the **Doctor Who** licence, with series such as **Dalek Empire**. But then we got **The Tomorrow People**, **Sapphire and Steel** and **Judge Dredd** all to some level of success. Recently we have been working with MGM on **Stargate** audios and have launched our successful **Dark Shadows** series – to much acclaim.

Do you have time to listen to all the Big Finish plays? Which are your favourites? And have you ever vetoed a particularly outlandish idea?

I've often been asked two questions: 'What's your favourite Big Finish release?' and 'Have you ever vetoed an idea the others have had?' I suspect, like the production team and actors on television, 'favourite' often depends on not just the story itself, but also the memories that are attached to it. For those reasons, here's my list (in no particular order):

Doctor Who: The Sirens of Time

It's the first **Doctor Who** – and seeing three Doctors in a studio again doing a show that (aside from one movie) had been cancelled ten years previously was a dream come true.

Doctor Who: The Holy Terror

The first Rob Shearman – we all knew.

Doctor Who: Storm Warning

Paul McGann in our studio, playing the Doctor. India Fisher is the perfect foil.

Doctor Who: The Chimes of Midnight

Rob Shearman again – we all knew. Including McGann, who credits this as one of his favourite scripts. I also met a young lady called Juliet Warner, who was to be my girlfriend for several years after this.

Doctor Who: Spare Parts

One of the best origin stories ever made. On first listen it made me cry.

Doctor Who: Neverland

The biggest epic in Big Finish history – so big we had to cut 10 minutes and make it into two 80-minute episodes just to get them on the compact discs. The Doctor and Charley discuss their love for each other. It's all about love, folks!

Doctor Who Unbound: Sympathy for the Devil

David Warner and the Brig – brilliant. And there's an amazing turn as Brimmicombe-Wood

by an actor called David Tennant in it – whatever happened to him?

Dalek Empire

Just unbelievably amazing. Sarah Mowat steals the show – if things had been different, she could have been a companion.

Doctor Who: Max Warp

I love Top Gear – which this has nothing to do with (says my lawyer). Honestly – don't know why I brought it up.

The Tomorrow People: A Living Hell

Great script – amazing acting and a team just having fun every time we got together.

The Adventures of Luther Arkwright

My favourite comic book from my misspent youth finally dramatised. With David Tennant battling it out with Paul Darrow as Cromwell. Truly proud of this one.

As for vetoing ideas, this very rarely happened. Maybe a handful of times in ten years. When an idea was vetoed, it was often for financial reasons rather than artistic.

How much did the return of **Doctor Who** impact on the Big Finish range?

When **Doctor Who** returned to television everyone said it would help Big Finish. It didn't. The return of the show led initially to falling sales as new **Doctor Who** was provided elsewhere. As the new seasons rolled by, many fans decided to come back and see what they had missed. Of greater damage has been piracy. As a small company, piracy really hurts and isn't a faceless crime.

Were you surprised when *Jubilee* was used as the basis for *Dalek* or did you always know it was more than good enough to be a TV episode? Are there any other Big Finish stories you'd love to see on TV?

Russell T Davies's decision to ask Rob Shearman to loosely adapt *Jubilee* to become *Dalek* was amazing. We were all so excited – and under strict instructions not to mention it until after the episode had been aired. Watching it on television many months later we were all filled with a sense of pride that something we had been involved in had made it into the television series. And a television series that was soaring in the ratings

and being heralded a critical hit. A version of *Spare Parts* followed and who knows what could happen in the future...? I would love to see *Sword of Orion* adapted for television – but it might just be too expensive, even now.

Doctor Who was cool. Probably cooler than at any time in its history. And now every good actor in the UK wanted to be in it... or, if we asked them, the audio series. During one recording that was particularly starchy, I remember Paul McGann putting his arm around my shoulders and saying 'bit of a fruity cast!' with a big smile on his face.

You direct the plays from time to time; is this an ambition you always had when the range began? Would you like to do more acting in them or write a story?

Looking back over the past decade, I am struck by all that we have achieved and the friendships that we have made. The fun came from working hard and playing hard. For me, my greatest enjoyment has come from directing productions such as **Luther Arkwright** and **Doctor Who: The Cannibalists**. But in general I just steered the ship and left the day-to-day running to those more capable – so my thanks to Gary, Nick, Alan, David, Ian, Xanna, John, Alistair, Nigel, Simon, Alex, the two Pauls and all our writers, directors, artists and sound designers.

What's the future for Big Finish?

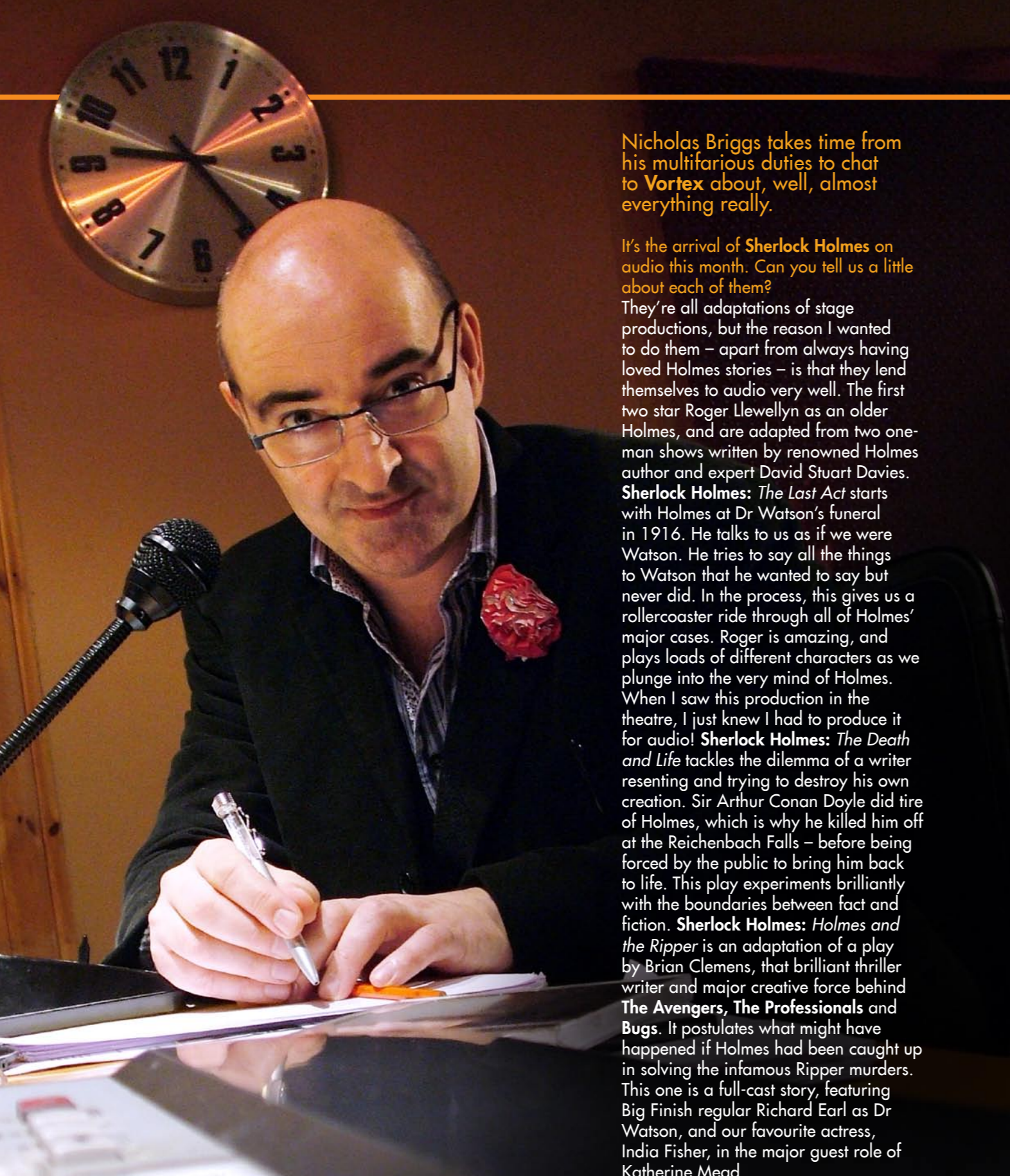
The future holds more **Doctor Who**, including the **Lost Stories**. New books, including Rob Shearman's new collection of short stories **Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical**. New series and new ideas. I hope you enjoy the ride!



Nicholas Briggs, Sheridan Smith and Jason Haigh-Ellery at the recording of *The Cannibalists*



Jason assembles his cast for Eighth Doctor adventure *The Cannibalists*



Nicholas Briggs takes time from his multifarious duties to chat to **Vortex** about, well, almost everything really.

It's the arrival of **Sherlock Holmes** on audio this month. Can you tell us a little about each of them?

They're all adaptations of stage productions, but the reason I wanted to do them – apart from always having loved Holmes stories – is that they lend themselves to audio very well. The first two star Roger Llewellyn as an older Holmes, and are adapted from two one-man shows written by renowned Holmes author and expert David Stuart Davies. **Sherlock Holmes: The Last Act** starts with Holmes at Dr Watson's funeral in 1916. He talks to us as if we were Watson. He tries to say all the things to Watson that he wanted to say but never did. In the process, this gives us a rollercoaster ride through all of Holmes' major cases. Roger is amazing, and plays loads of different characters as we plunge into the very mind of Holmes. When I saw this production in the theatre, I just knew I had to produce it for audio! **Sherlock Holmes: The Death and Life** tackles the dilemma of a writer resenting and trying to destroy his own creation. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did tire of Holmes, which is why he killed him off at the Reichenbach Falls – before being forced by the public to bring him back to life. This play experiments brilliantly with the boundaries between fact and fiction. **Sherlock Holmes: Holmes and the Ripper** is an adaptation of a play by Brian Clemens, that brilliant thriller writer and major creative force behind **The Avengers**, **The Professionals** and **Bugs**. It postulates what might have happened if Holmes had been caught up in solving the infamous Ripper murders. This one is a full-cast story, featuring Big Finish regular Richard Earl as Dr Watson, and our favourite actress, India Fisher, in the major guest role of Katherine Mead.

You're playing Holmes in the final story. Did your performance alter between playing audio Holmes and stage Holmes?

The one performance informed the other. Having done *Holmes and the Ripper* in August 2008 at the Theatre Royal Nottingham meant that when I came to the microphone, a lot of the emotional memory of playing the part came flooding back to me. A lot of the decisions about how to play scenes now seemed totally instinctive. And the most exciting thing for me was that the parts of my performance that the stage director had said were 'too quiet' or 'too subtle' could now work really well. I could go as 'small' and intimate as I needed to. As an actor, you never feel that your work has been perfect. There are always nagging little doubts about intricate moments you didn't quite get right, so this time I was able to pinpoint those elements and be far more precise.

You've played the character a few times now; what's his appeal?

Playing Holmes in this audio production will be my fourth outing in the role. I first played him on stage in *The Speckled Band* at exactly the same time as I was doing the sound design and music for our first **Doctor Who** adventure, *The Sirens of Time*. It was directed by the 'famous' Ken Bentley! Then, ten years later, I did *Holmes and the Ripper*. That was such a success at the Theatre Royal that they asked me back to play Holmes again this year. The director said he was doing *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and was adapting it himself. But it soon became obvious to me that he wasn't too clear of what approach to take. So I ended up writing the adaptation. It all went rather well. As for the appeal... I joke that it's a bit like playing the Doctor! But at the root of it is that I love playing single-minded characters. And Holmes is totally single-minded when he's on a case. All his mental energies and actions are directed at the case. I find that kind of character very rewarding to play because it's so unlike me. It really focuses my mind. It's a tremendous strain. There's no hesitation with Holmes, no nonsense, no strange character tics. He ploughs straight on. It's an exhausting and exhilarating emotional and mental exercise.

Will *Baskervilles* be coming to audio?

My adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* took as its central idea the notion that Watson might adapt one of his stories for the stage. So it's a kind of 'Hound Revisited' story, with Watson taking Holmes through

the play; in the process Holmes is kind of haunted by the hound. I would love to do that on audio, because it's not just a straight adaptation. It kind of develops and investigates the story. I was struck, while re-reading and re-reading the original, how utterly terrifying the hound is. It clearly strikes terror into the hearts of all who hear it, and Holmes and Watson are deeply affected by it. That's something that's never really been entirely successfully achieved in any adaptation. I think an audio version would work brilliantly, because ultimately you don't have the potential disappointment of 'Oh, the hound wasn't quite frightening enough'.

What are your hopes for the **Holmes** range? Would you consider dramatising Conan Doyle's books, or will you be seeking out more recent iterations of Holmes or getting new stories written?

All the original Holmes stories have been brilliantly adapted for radio, so I would worry that it would be retreading old ground to do new adaptations. That said, if, like my *Hound* adaptation, we could find new angles, then I wouldn't rule adaptations out. However, should these three releases be successful, my intention is to do 'new' Holmes stories. David Stuart Davies is keen to be involved, and I'm very keen to adapt his brilliant Holmes book, *The Tangled Skein*.

It's the Big Finish anniversary issue; how were you first brought into the fold?

I was part of the fold. Years and years ago, I'd starred as the Doctor in a set of audio **Doctor Whos** that we did for fun and no money. Just fans playing about, but we got more and more serious about it. Our last 'season' was produced by Gary Russell, and when it was all over and done with and we had proper jobs, Gary and I reflected that we'd love to do **Doctor Who** audios 'properly', with BBC approval. Gary eventually made that happen, through his BBC contacts and his old friend Jason Haigh-Ellery. I'd already worked on Big Finish's **Bernice Summerfield** releases, which turned out to be our 'audition' for **Doctor Who**, so when BF got the **Doctor Who** licence, Gary came to me and asked me to do the first one. My involvement varied in intensity over the years, but I was always at the centre of it, always at the meetings discussing policy. Big Finish is in my blood.

What experience did you have of writing, directing, composing and acting before working for BF? Did you have a particular career path planned as one of those things, or were you just keen to try everything?

The term 'career path' makes me chortle. Ah, if only I'd been that organized. My problem has always been that I hate doing things I don't like. Well, I know that's not particularly unique, but I largely refuse to do things I

NICK OF TIME

don't like. Which means that I've spent most of my life being very poor indeed. I set out in life to be an actor, but then I got massively side-tracked into doing those **Doctor Who** plays for fun. And during that time, I wrote an enormous amount and developed my skills as a sound designer. When I went on to do quite a bit of theatre work, that sound design thing would haunt me a bit, because producers found out that I had a useful skill. I remember re-editing a quarter-inch sound tape – razor and tape! – in my Heathcliff costume just five minutes before curtain-up! But what I've discovered over the years is that although at the heart of me I'm an actor, I just want to do all the things I can do. All the writing, sound design and music... all of it, it's about communication and entertainment. That's what I want to be doing, communicating and entertaining. It's the main thread that runs through all my work, even when I worked on magazines or when I was trapped in an office being the press and PR manager of The Sci-Fi Channel.

You're now executive producer of Big Finish; what changes have you made since taking over the reins, and what are you most proud of accomplishing? I know it may sound corny, but I'm mostly proud of the team. I feel we've got a great bunch of people together who love their work and who are all prepared to go the extra mile at a moment's notice. I had the advantage of watching my predecessor, Gary Russell, at work in the job for around seven years. His energy was limitless and the hours he would put in were... phenomenally unhealthy. I'd drive past the office late at night, on the way back from a good night out or a weekend away, and I'd see that light on, and I'd know that Gary had probably been there for almost twenty-four hours without a break, with only cans of coke and packets of biscuits for company. So when it came to be my turn, I knew for sure that I couldn't work that way. That I couldn't script edit and direct every single **Doctor Who** story. That I couldn't handle all the design work, all the PR work, all the casting etc. So I set about convincing Jason Haigh-Ellery that we needed more people. I took a huge cut from my potential pay for a start, so there would be more money to go round. I found ways of paying the directors more for their work and recruited more directors. I recruited more sound designers as the few we had were crumbling under the workload. I cut back the episode lengths of the **Doctor Whos** to a strict 25 minutes. Some of the episodes were regularly hitting the 40 to 45 minute mark, but most were at least 35 minutes. Think of all the extra work across the board that produces. More time in studio, more time sound designing and composing! So, uncharacteristically for me, I wanted to make the operation more ordered and more manageable. It took well over a year to get things under control, and slightly longer than that to get to the point where I was actually producing the stories I wanted to produce. I was left with a lot of script commissions that didn't fit with what I wanted to do, so

there was a hell of a lot of complicated work getting round that problem. It would take a book to explain that! And probably a book that no one would be interested in reading... except for lawyers, possibly.

But back to the team. I couldn't have done it without script editor Alan Barnes. He is a powerhouse of narrative invention. He never stops. He's moody and grumpy and a bleedin' genius. I love that man... in a totally professional sort of way you understand, folks. Then there's David Richardson, who already loved Big Finish before he arrived, which is why I gave him the job. He's totally embraced Big Finish and has become its nerve centre. He runs it. It's his life and he loves it. And that's the key to any success I've had with Big Finish, a team of people who love the work. Director Barnaby Edwards, who totally immerses himself in every aspect of a production. Alex Mallinson, whose passion and talent for design is unmatched anywhere in the known universe. Paul Wilson, who does the job of a whole corporation, creating and looking after our online presence and dealing with every single one of our computery, technical issues... 'Paul, my email's not working again!' 'Have you tried switching it on and off?' 'Oh...'. And most recently, Paul Spragg has joined us, and already his life has been joyfully sucked into the Big Finish vortex. That's the vortex in which, despite the fact that it's nine o'clock on a Sunday night, you still send an email about work. Yes, we're all in that vortex. We may end up divorced and alone, but at least we'll have Big Finish when all's said and done. Big Finish ate our lives! That could be the title of my book, couldn't it?

Which are your favourite stories, and did you write all of them?

Naturally, I love my work, so quite a lot of my favourite stories are written by me! But my list of my favourite stories would be very long. We work long and hard on the scripts, the casting, the directing, the post-production... so it would be odd if I could only be enthusiastic about a few. It would be easier to list the ones I don't like. But that would be tactless and boring. So I'll just cream off the very top... I think *The Girl Who Never Was* is a fantastic piece of work. And, immodestly, I'm rather partial to *Sisters of the Flame* and *The Vengeance of Morbius*. I particularly liked Sheridan driving the first of those – she's fantastic – and Sam West as Morbius is amazing. That seemed to go a bit unnoticed. I think it should be recognized as one of the great villain performances in **Doctor Who** history. Breathtakingly classy! I loved *Bride of Peladon* too.

How important is it for you to direct the stories you write?

Fairly, but not essential. When I first took over, for example, I simply didn't have the time to direct. So Barney directed my Ice Warrior story, *Frozen Time*. He did a great job, but it was... odd. He had the actors

play almost all the scenes in the opposite way to how I would have directed them. It was almost like he had them being funny on lines I thought were serious and vice versa. A script is very personal to its writer, and if you're also an experienced director, it is quite difficult to have someone else direct it. It's a bit like writing a song, and then hearing someone sing it to a largely different tune. Very strange.

Former producer Gary Russell now approves storylines, titles, etc for the BBC. Do you still get input from him on the ranges or does he leave you to your own devices?

Gary's input has been extremely useful. He knows exactly what we're about. It would be a very different experience if we were dealing with someone who knew nothing about Big Finish. Gary advises on clashes of content between the TV series and us and on matters of BBC Compliance; that is to say, whether or not something is suitable for the brand or the audience. He will sometimes offer editorial opinions in an unofficial, non-binding way. And he and I will chat from time to time about specific issues. But he has Big Finish's best interests at heart. He more or less created the whole thing, so I think he's keen for us to succeed.

You've been what many consider the definitive Dalek voice for a long while now. Does it still have an appeal or is it just a job to you now?

It is a job. It's a great job. There's always a new challenge. Of course, I don't get quite the same buzz as I did when I first went down to Cardiff for *Dalek*, but it's still an exciting part of my career. I love some of the peripheral stuff. For three years now, I've hosted a **Doctor Who** quiz at the Bath Literary Festival. Just me and four hundred screaming kids and their almost as excited parents. I just love the fact that kids are so thrilled about the series and the Daleks in particular.

Did you ever imagine you'd end up voicing Daleks on the TV series? How did you end up voicing the Nestene, Judoon and Cybermen as well?

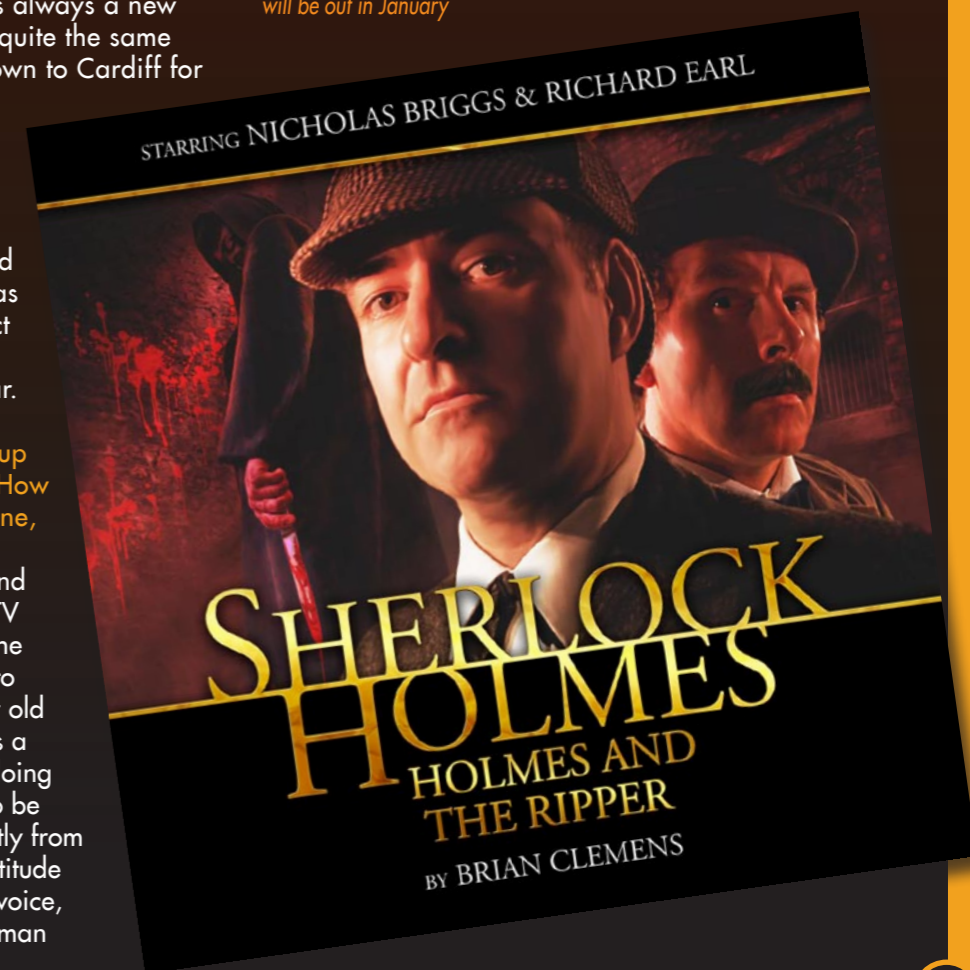
It never crossed my mind that I'd end up doing the Dalek voices for the TV series. I think I dreamed of being the Doctor. And I was always striving to create a proper Dalek voice on my old tape recorder at home, when I was a kid. But no, I didn't ever imagine doing the voice. I just wanted the voice to be good. The other voices came directly from doing the Dalek. I think Russell's attitude was, 'If you need a good monster voice, Nick's the man to ask!'. The Cyberman

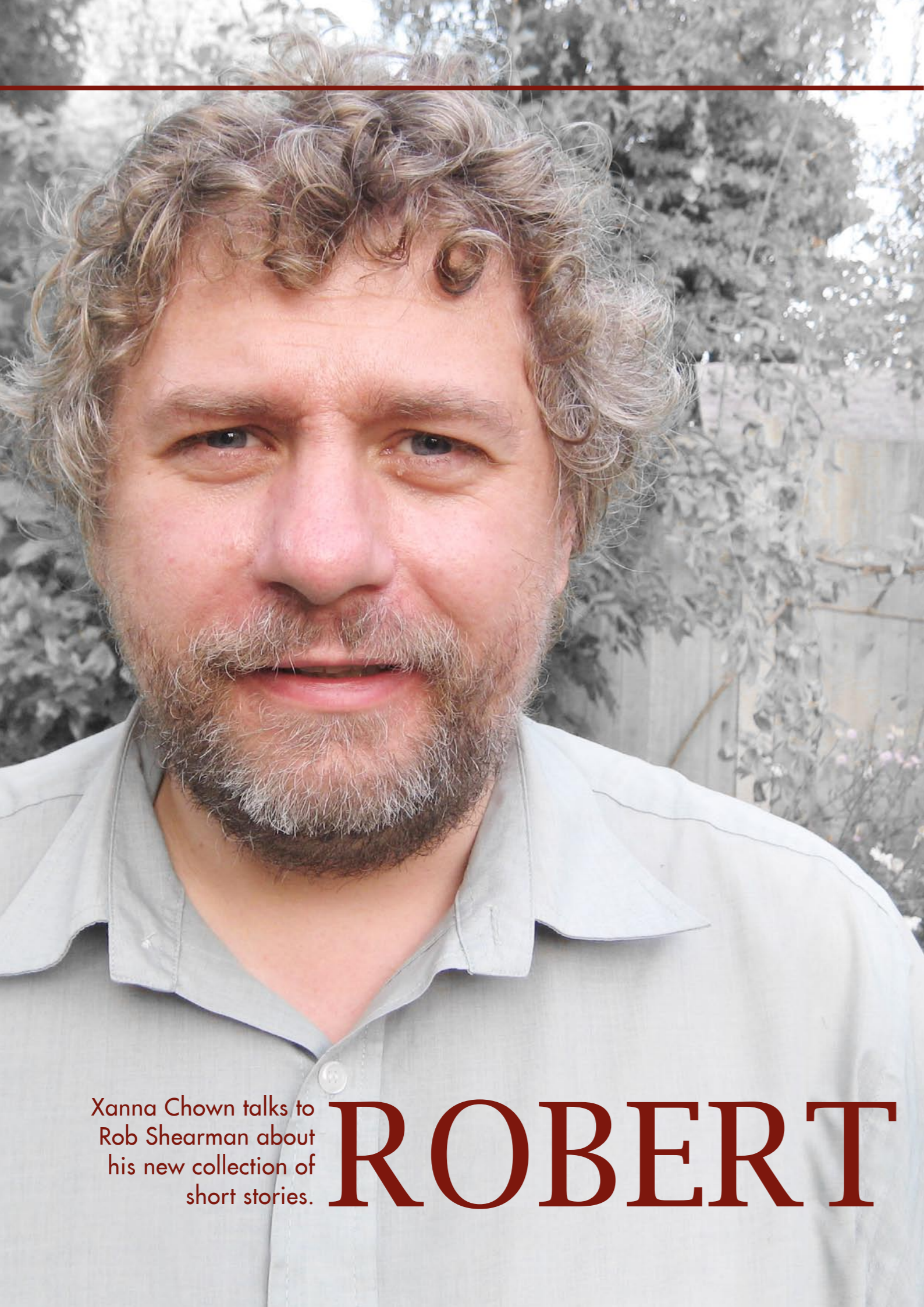
thing was bizarre, because everyone just assumed I was doing that. To the point that I was sitting at home wondering whether anyone would ever book me to do the job, and David Tennant was texting me saying, 'Yes, you've got the job, why aren't you here?' Russell phoned me to talk about how he'd like the Cyberman voice to be and then said, 'See you soon?' and I replied, 'Well, I presume so.' He said, 'What do you mean, you presume so?' I told him that no one had booked me for the job, to which he said, 'Right! I'm going to kick some arse!' Next thing, I got the biggest TV booking of my life. It was, after all, the Daleks and the Cybermen in the same block!

If money, clearances etc were no object, what series would you most like to see on audio?

Oh blimey... loads of stuff. I want to do an original science fiction series, but we're hoping to do that. I'll say no more. I'm writing the script. I'd love to do **Star Trek** in some form or other. I'd love to do a load of the Gerry Anderson shows: **Thunderbirds**, **UFO**, **Stingray**... I've got some great **Stingray** ideas! I'd love to do **The Avengers**. We seriously considered that a few years ago. Oh, and James Bond. James Bond strictly adapted from the novels, so they'd be old fashioned period pieces. And Sherlock Holmes, I'd love to do... oh, hang on!

Sherlock Holmes: Holmes and the Ripper is available to pre-order and will be out in January





Xanna Chown talks to Rob Shearman about his new collection of short stories.

ROBERT

SHEARMAN

Your collection is called **Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical**. It's not really a collection of conventional love stories though, is it?

Ha! Well, no, not really. They're not on the chocolate box and roses side of love. They're a bit more twisted and quirky than that. So there's a story about a man whose wife leaves him – and gives him back his own heart that she's been keeping in a Tupperware box. And as the days go by, and he adjusts to being single, the heart begins to grow specks of bone. Or there's the one about the woman who loses her husband on a business trip in Luxembourg when the whole country simply vanishes overnight from the face of the globe – and how you cope with grief when you're not really sure you should be grieving in the first place. We've got talking pigs in the Garden of Eden composing the very first love songs, we've got grown men taking jobs as trees simply to support the family they adore. Ghost cats and mutant rabbits and succubus women who do very strange things when they kiss you.

They're stories about love, really, rather than just being love stories. Looking at love from strange angles, trying to ask why we all keep falling into something that makes us so vulnerable. Some of them are meant to be a bit scary. But I hope they all might make people laugh a bit. Even whilst they're cringing!

There is a conventional love story that appears in one of the stories – but it's written by the Devil and it doesn't do the people who read it much good...

No. The poor old Devil gets so tired doing his regular day job – you know, torturing souls and punishing people. So he has this gentle little hobby of writing romantic fiction. Nice romantic fiction, nothing ironic – just something for him. And he sends it out to publishers under a pseudonym, he doesn't want this little sideline of his to have anything to do with being the Prince of Darkness. But even though the book is entirely innocent and really very sweet, anyone who reads it finds themselves condemned to Hell for all eternity. The Devil gets a bit irritated by that.

You do feel a little sorry for him. You have a way of making the reader feel sorry for people you probably shouldn't. In one story, you end up sympathizing more with a kidnapper than his victim...

Yeah, that's an odd one. It's a horror story, really. Written as a series of letters, by a woman who's been abducted and begins to fall in love with her abductor (who may, or may not, look a little like George Clooney). And the more her love grows, the more powerful she becomes. My wife likes that one. It makes her laugh.

Yes, how does your wife feel about all these love stories? They do present a rather cynical side to love. Doesn't she get worried?

Oh, I'm really fond of love! As an emotion, I think it's the bees' knees. But I've always had this problem – it's a writer's problem, really – that even when I'm very, very happy, there's a part of my brain that's buzzing away saying, 'What if...?' What if things were the opposite, wouldn't that make a funny story?' Janie knows that the nastier the stories I come up with, the more contented I probably am. She's got used to the fact that I take perfectly sweet incidents we've shared or conversations we've had, and they'll end up being distorted and twisted in some really barbed way in a story about mutant rabbits or something. I think now she'd be more worried if I came up with something that was very gentle and mushy – what on earth would that say about what was really going on with us?

Moving on... Do you have a favourite story in the collection?

Oh, I try not to. I think writing is largely about economy, and being your harshest critic. Once I start liking a story too much, it makes me suspicious. What on earth's wrong with it? And it's a funny thing – when you start working on any story, and you're in the process of writing it, you utterly fall in love with it. There's a part of you that really hopes this might just be the best thing you've ever written, that this will be The One that proves to you that taking on this writing lark was a worthwhile career in the first place. You write it with such energy and such belief. Then you edit it and cut it and tweak it – and you've had this wonderful romance with the story in your head, and now what you're doing to it is about as romantic as cutting its toenails. And then it's written, and if it's good enough you let people read it, and if it isn't, you don't. And you're on to the next one, you've fallen in love with another story altogether! It becomes like a series of one night

stands. Afterwards you get them in book form, and you feel a little socially embarrassed around them. "Hello, story, we had fun that time, didn't we? I'm sorry, I've moved on to somebody else."

But one of the stories is a little bit different – it's hidden somewhere in the book for the reader to search for.

The Hidden Story – yes, it appears in the contents, but after that the reader's on their own. It was a silly idea! It made me laugh a lot, though, when it popped into my head. I wanted to tell a story about love letters that were found hidden inside books.

There are fifty collector's editions where you don't have to try so hard to find it, though.

Yes, it occurred to me that the best way of presenting that story would be to actually do it – to have, within our book, a story contained within an envelope. Handwritten by me to the reader, each one individually, so that it's as personal as can be. And because it's about letters that are found inside books, there are actually three envelopes, each inside the other, as a sort of Russian doll effect – as the love story I've written gets longer and darker.

So you wrote the story out fifty times...

I'd completely misunderstood how hard a task it would be! The story's not that long, but it's well over a thousand words – so, yeah, I must have written well over 50,000 words out. Ouch. And in my best handwriting too, which is very difficult for me, because I'm very scatty! (Though a lot of the letters do have crossings out and corrections on them – all part of their being unique!) It took about a month, I tried to get through a couple a day, whilst taking a break from Real Work. I half watched a lot of very bad afternoon television whilst doing so. And I finished the last batch recently on a long flight to Singapore – whilst blubbing over the movies I was watching, of course. Those ones are stained with jetlagged tears.

Tiny Deaths, your first short story collection, won the World Fantasy Award. Has Love Songs been entered for any awards?

Tiny Deaths did surprisingly well. I didn't expect anyone to read my first book, let alone give it critical attention. But we picked up some literary award nominations, such as the Edge Hill Short Story Prize and the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. And then we actually won the World Fantasy Award, which was a tremendous shock – I had to fly over to Calgary to pick up a statuette. (I should say it's a beautifully ugly award – it's cast in silver resin, and it's HP Lovecraft's head – and let me tell you, the creator of Cthulu

was by no means a looker. Going back through immigration, the customs officials were so repulsed by it that they refused to touch it. And I think I love it all the more for that – I write ugly funny things, so the award seems wonderfully appropriate!) One of the stories from **Tiny Deaths** was recently selected as international representative by the National Library of Singapore as their short story of the year – so I had to dust off my suit again. That was wonderful.

What's lovely is that the first book seems to have appealed to both the genre and the literary types – and that makes me very happy. I just want my stuff to be read and enjoyed. I know there's interest in **Love Songs** by various bodies – and if I'm honest, I do prefer the new book. I think it's funnier and more personal. So we'll have to wait and see!

Some of the stories have been read out on the radio. How does it feel to hear someone else reading out your stories?

I squirm. Really. It's odd, because for fifteen years my job has been writing drama – for theatre, mostly, but TV and radio too. And you get used to that, you know that the whole point is that your words are to be spoken aloud by other people. I've always found it interesting that actors will take the lines you've written and reinterpret them as their own. As an example we'll all be aware of: when Chris Eccleston's Doctor first meets the Dalek, it's electric, there's such anger and terror in his performance. But the lines themselves were very old school **Doctor Who**, they could so easily have been ironic and arch. But the short stories are different, because they're a lot more me, they come straight from my head to the page. So it's fascinating to hear actors read them on air, but it makes me a bit uncomfortable – it's a bit like finding a stranger rooting through your wardrobe and putting on your clothes. Big Finish will be releasing an audio book of **Love Songs** in the new year, with seven actors reading seven of the stories – so I expect to be seeing a lot of people in that wardrobe very soon.

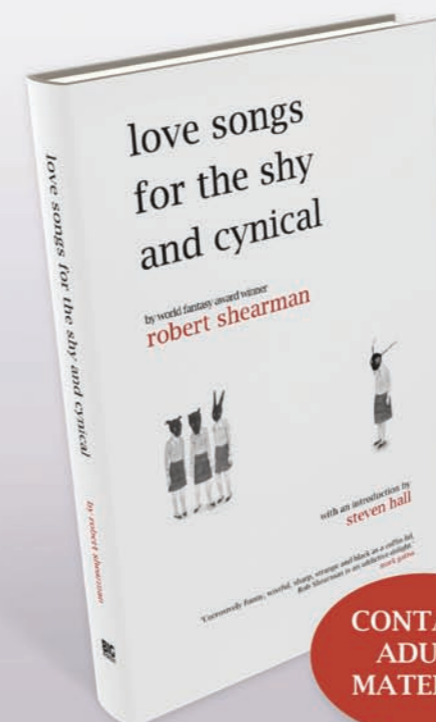
And will we be able to find you signing copies anywhere in the near future?

I hope so! There are launches being prepared, both in Britain and overseas, from the US to Singapore. And I'm hoping to travel as much of the country as wants me, doing readings and signings in bookshops. If anyone out there reading this would like a bit of Love Songs near them, do write and tell us – and we'll do our best to accommodate!

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Cover illustration by Rachel Goodyear



To help celebrate the launch of Big Finish's first run of **Sherlock Holmes** releases, we talked to Holmes himself from the opening two instalments: Roger Llewellyn

How did Sherlock Holmes on audio come about?

Your esteemed producer [Nick Briggs] saw *The Last Act*, because his lovely partner had booked the seats (Thanks Steph.) At the interval Nick went to buy the CD he assumed would be on sale to find it wasn't! They then came to see *Death & Life* and "our career together had begun"! (*The Last Act*, page 11.)

How did you find the experience of studio recording?

It was not an area of work I knew well but, because of the excellent studio circumstances (and the compliments and especially the food!!), I found it gave me a lot of options which are unavailable in my usual live performances. For instance, extremes of emotion could be conveyed by intense, low-key delivery, rather than the larger vocalisation required in a big space. Also, significantly, lines/thoughts can be 'thrown away' much more easily, which adds to verisimilitude and humour.

How much preparation did you do in advance?

A huge amount. I raided the experience of three close friends who are masters of the dark art of audio-world. I recorded the shows on to cassette many times, then had to listen back to it and make choices. I got *really* fed up with the sound of my own voice... and you won't catch me saying that very often!

How many parts do you play in the productions?

About fourteen in *The Last Act* and a mere seven in *Death & Life*.

Do you ever get confused in performance as to which play you are in and momentarily forget which voice you should be using?

No, not in the slightest. Even though some of the characters are duplicated, and some direct quotes from Doyle are repeated but then move on to different text. In each play I am in a totally different place mentally, following separate plotlines. I'm on the M1 or the M4... they are not interchangeable.

It involves much more than using a different voice.

They have to exist in my head as distinct characters to make the interplay between them work effectively. The only occasion when an issue like this has arisen has

been over the first year of the new play (*D&L*). Quite inaccurately, and as one reviewer who nevertheless liked it, said, 'uncanonically' (Conan Doyle's works are referred to as 'the canon' in Sherlockian circles) in rehearsal I had chosen to give Moriarty a sort of mysterious Mittel European 'evil' accent, to differentiate him very strongly from his 'dark twin, alter ego' Holmes.

But I realised as the months went by that a) it was too unfaithful to the book and b) it would be more sophisticated as a performer to make the differences more subtle. This change involved a great deal of re-rehearsal, and when I first integrated it into the performances I did occasionally catch myself – in moments of high passion! – slipping back into Bela Lugosi territory. But it didn't happen often or for long, and he is now firmly in the English Upper Class.

What changes were made to convert the plays to an audio-only format?

Surprisingly few. That was one of the attractions for Nick when he first saw *The Last Act*. He thought how easily it would transfer into audio format. There are several 'mute' moments in both plays... partly to give the audience a rest from my booming cords, but more significantly to move the story on in a different way. Sometimes it is an expression of emotion passing over the face or a dawning realisation: "The bottle's empty!" "The man has no pulse!" We managed to solve these few minor issues with very brief vocalised insertions.

Did the lack of an audience alter your performance?

It was not unusual for me, as I work on the plays at home and on tour all the time, keeping them fresh, finding new thoughts and insights, so I am very used to giving it full value without helpful laughs (or less helpful coughs).

Are you still touring the productions, and where can fans next see them?

There are 28 performances scheduled on the current September-December '09 leg, and they are all to be found on www.rogerllewellyn.co.uk

Are there further Holmes one-man shows in development?

I think not! David Stuart Davies showed great ingenuity in coming up with the original concept for *The Last Act*, my having previously said that, much

as I might wish it, there was no way of playing Holmes in a solo drama. Then when asked to repeat the triumph, he pulled off a brilliant coup

HOLMES ALONE



Nicholas Briggs, Roger Llewellyn and David Stuart Davies gather at the Moat for The Death and Life

in actually devising a second ingenious concept for this genre. But I doubt even his world class Holmes hinterland of knowledge could come up with a third. Also, preparing, rehearsing, composing, designing and producing these plays takes the best part of a year, and involves a great deal of work, planning and organisation. I am hardly recovered from the last effort, and that was nearly 18 months ago. And I doubt that there would be a commercial market for yet another Llewellyn/Holmes manifestation!

How would you like to see the character develop? He has developed hugely over the years of our association (12, if you count my first encounter in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in '97) and continues to do so at almost every performance, in sometimes tiny, sometimes major, ways. One of the most intriguing aspects of the character is that the more arrogant, insensitive and self-regarding I make him, the more the audience warms to him. Probably because the writer constantly gives us glimpses of the real man

who lies beneath. It is not easy to relate to, or even like, extreme intelligence alone, there must be human qualities as well.

Why is Sherlock Holmes still as fascinating a character today as he was when first created? That is the \$64,000 question, asked repeatedly by journalists all over the world!!!! And I don't know. There are many and various theories: nostalgia for Victorian/Edwardian London – pea soups, gas lamps, hansom cabs, story-book villains, and their downfall. The regular victory of Holmes' *moral* justice, as against the often fallible *legal* justice. Fascination with the unique workings of an extraordinary brain. The contrast between two men who nevertheless manage to work together so closely. Take your pick... or add some more. Whatever the reasons, Holmes seems to feed an insatiable international need which has never suffered a setback, and seems to be growing faster than ever. Thank the Lord! And... "Watson! Pass the ammunition!"

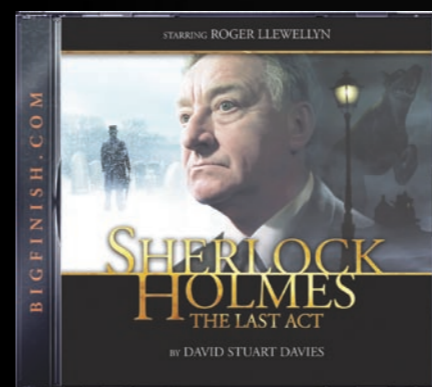
Sherlock Holmes: The Last Act is out this month. Sherlock Holmes: The Death and Life is out in December



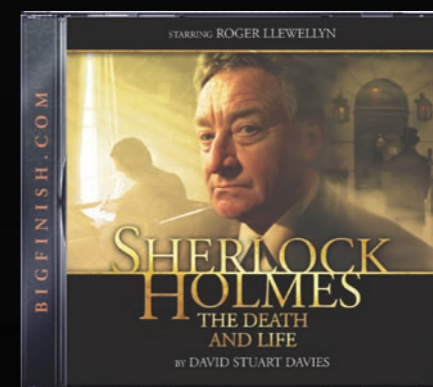
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ALEX MALLINSON

Big Finish's own digital drudge, Alex Mallinson, yields to a grilling from **Vortex**.

So, pixel monkey, how many covers have you done for Big Finish and which ones do you consider at each end of your personal artistic spectrum?

I've just totalled it up and it's a shocking 64 covers so far across several ranges. I came to a realisation around the time of *Brotherhood of the Daleks* that I turned in my best work when I was trying to please no one but myself. It sounds selfish but when one's attempting to keep lots of people happy: the fans (of which I am one), the producers, etc, it becomes easy to end up with something diluted. We experimented initially with simply illustrating a single scene from the play as on the covers of *Exotron* and *I.D.*, which I don't think went down well. Now the booklet illustrations fulfil that role.

I was also very conscious of the legacy of Clayton Hickman and Lee Binding and had been trying, poorly, to emulate them. So from *Brotherhood* onwards I just went with my instinct and I hope it's paid off. Nick and David certainly afford me a lot of creative freedom and I'm very grateful to them for that.

As for the cover I'm most proud of, there's no easy answer. I quite like the restraint of *Angel of Scutari*, with my housemate Tony on horseback. (He was actually perched on the sofa.) I'm also quite pleased with the new **Holmes** covers as I've been experimenting with some new techniques. I think it has to be the **Lost Stories** though, as I was right out of my comfort zone on those. David directed that they all be on a white background which means they're really naked covers so you can't hide behind overlays or soft-focus.

How did you get involved with Big Finish?

There are three people to blame for this. James Swallow I met in a queue to get our **Shaun of the Dead** soundtracks signed by the cast, and he introduced me to John Ainsworth, who employed me on his steampunk audio series **Space 1889**. John then got me into Big Finish creating and laying out the adverts and introduced me to Nick Briggs, who, despite me spilling my drink on him, got me on board when he took over the reins. Now I've added cast photographer and occasional screamer to my list of duties.

Who's been your favourite actor to watch at work in the BF studios?

I don't know about working, but Noel Clarke was certainly entertaining, for reasons that will never make it past the rigorous decency filter we employ at Big

Finish. Nickolas Grace was brilliant at the *Morbius* recording. He has such a distinctive voice and presence, plus he was terribly gracious and savagely funny. It's easily India Fisher though. She's hilarious in the green room and then on mic she brings the script instantly to life with her... I want to say chocolatey tones, but that just sounds like a **Masterchef** joke.

Which role has been your defining performance in a Big Finish audio?

I'm about to play my second mute on audio so I think that says a lot for my abilities.

Really though, being part of the recordings has given me a huge appreciation of the job the actors and directors do. Most of my duties are very solitary so it's great to be involved in something so collaborative, even if called on simply to grunt and growl. I'm hoping to carve out a small niche as BF's E-list monster guy after Nick, Toby Longworth and Jez Fielder. I'm learning so much though, and if I know I've got a small part coming up, I tend to improvise in the shower for long periods. That said, the other day I was reminded how high the bar is set when David invited me into the control room. We listened to the spoilerific finale of a recording due out in the first half of next year and despite the lack of music and sound effects, the immediacy of the performances was just wonderful.

How long does it usually take to put together a cover image, and how do you never run out of images from the show to use?

We actually ran out of Doctor photos three years ago and they're now entirely computer-generated.

The covers can take anything from a day onwards. Some come together really quickly either because the idea just falls into place instantly or because I have a ruthless deadline to meet. *Paper Cuts*, despite having lots of CG, was done in two days because of a tight deadline. *Nightmare Fair* technically took about four months of on-off tweaking because I just couldn't nail the look and techniques. The winner is *Rebecca's World* though, which has so far taken over a year and is on its fifth completely new cover.

Finally, if you could be any kind of biscuit, what kind of biscuit would you be?

I'm clearly a rich tea biscuit, because I go to pieces at the first sign of pressure.

Alex Mallinson, thank you for talking to **Vortex**. Now get back to work.

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I've recently started a six-release subscription for the monthly **Doctor Who** range, and I just wanted to say thank you to all involved: the writers, cast, and crew have combined to make some high quality work. And having the convenience and reasonable price of the download service (at least for the US pricing) is fantastic. The cost of the CD releases, especially over here in the US, had made it prohibitively expensive for me to get every release, so I usually ended up scouring eBay and Amazon for used copies of the CDs. But this is much easier and better.

I've been so impressed with the main range that I started a subscription for the new season of the **Companion Chronicles** as well, and will have to start getting caught up with the back editions. I was delighted by how well Frazer Hines does a vocal impression of Patrick Troughton's Doctor... spot-on perfect.

Anyway, enough fanboy gushing. Thanks again.
Peter Munroe

Nick Briggs: It's our pleasure, Peter. We'd known for a long time that the pricing of the CDs for the American market did not compare favourably with other CDs. This was an annoying quirk of the difference between national markets and their pricing structures. So, personally, I was very pleased when the downloads provided us with an opportunity to redress the balance.

I am interested in a subscription to the **Doctor Who** CDs, though I do not want to get the Sylvester McCoy episodes. I primarily want the Paul McGann, Peter Davison or other episodes. I noticed you had a subscription for twelve consecutive CDs. Do you possibly have a CD subscription based on what Doctor you want to get? I'd like to get them, just not a big McCoy fan. Sorry...

Adam D Willson

Nick Briggs: The issue of Doctor-specific subscriptions is one we discuss on a regular basis. The Paul McGann seasons are currently available with their own subscriptions, but we still think it is best for the main, monthly range to have its own subscription. But the matter continues to be reviewed.

Hello! As a regular listener to the Big Finish podcasts, I thought I would make a suggestion for the next in the free story line. To my knowledge, the **Bernice Summerfield** story *Making Myths* has only ever been available on the *Buried Treasures* CD for pre-order subscribers to the Time Ring Trilogy. Now that this is long out of print and impossible to find on eBay or the like, it might be fun to run this as one of the free stories similar to

the recent *Last of the Titans* podcasts. I think a lot of folks like myself who came to be fans of the **Benny** audios later on in her adventures would appreciate a chance to hear this one.

Thanks for taking time to read this. Keep up the great work!
Jake Swantz

Nick Briggs: I will look into this. It's an excellent idea, Jake. There may be a rights issue we'd have to address. But I will see...

It's coming to that time of year when subscribers to your **Doctor Who** range receive a free CD. I think this is unfair to your loyal customers who buy the CDs monthly in the shops.

You may say that subscribers are the lifeblood of the company and their loyalty should be rewarded but, hang on, I've bought your products in shops since back in the days of *Sirens of Time* and there is a case to be made that my purchasing along with the many other loyal customers is responsible for the CDs continuing to be stocked in those shops. That is, you only continue to have a visible presence in shops and the ability to pick up new customers due to people like me. I'm sure you've got a significant number of new buyers due to the simple act of people browsing in a shop and finding a product that they hadn't previously known about.

I'm suggesting that it would be more fair if each monthly release of **Doctor Who** had a printed token inside and, after you'd collected a certain number of differently numbered tokens, you could redeem them against the subscriber freebie. This would reward loyalty to the range in the same way as your subscriber reward.

Anyway, that's my view. Best wishes.
David Lawrence

Nick Briggs: Dear David, I completely follow your argument, but there are always hard choices to be made when running a commercial company. You know how the old argument goes, I expect. We have to make money in order to continue making the productions. And it is a simple fact that the subscribers are our lifeblood. Naturally, we are grateful for all sales, but the fact is that a CD bought direct from us brings in far more money than a sale from a shop or other source. In order to ensure an appropriate stream of funds for productions, we must encourage the most profitable form of sales. That is why we concentrate all our incentives on subscribers. It would not make economic sense to give incentives for people to buy CDs from sources that do not provide us with a significant return. It is your choice to ignore those incentives if you wish. And you are right, I'm sure there are

a number of sales that occur when someone is browsing in a shop. But our aim would be for such a browsing buyer to see the website address in the CD packaging and then find out how much better it would be for them to subscribe. I know that's not the answer you want, but I see a large part of my job being to ensure the commercial viability of Big Finish. The course you suggest is the opposite path.

I'm writing to say how pleased I am that you are doing a second season of the **Cyberman** spin-off. The Cybermen are amongst my favourite **Doctor Who** villains. It would be great to have another mainstream **Doctor Who** audio (or spin-off come to think of it) featuring the *Tenth Planet*-style Cybermen; Nick does their voices ridiculously well. It'd be nice to find out what happened to Cyber-Commander Zheng after *Spare Parts*.

Don't know if there are any plans for another story featuring the Master but I reckon one is long overdue. There's nothing quite like a shock reveal with the words 'I am the Master...' *Dust Breeding* and *Sympathy for the Devil* were great in that regard — actually, they were great in every regard.

Lastly, I'm not sure why you haven't used them yet but I think it would be excellent to have the Sontarans in an audio. If they were presented in a similar vein as Linx from *The Time Warrior* rather than the ones from *The Two Doctors* they would make highly effective and interesting opponents for the Doctor or indeed fertile characters for a spin-off.

Thanks for reading, keep up the good work.
Andrew

Nick Briggs: **Cyberman 2** will now be released in December. Apologies for the delay, but there was a hold-up in the sound design process. You may have noticed that I have elected to make the standard Big Finish Cybermen rather like the *Tenth Planet* style of Cyberman. I think that strange intonation works very well for audio. So the Cybermen featured in **Cyberman 2** are that style of *Tenth Planet*-esque Cyberman. We have no plans for a direct *Tenth Planet* spin-off, though. As for the Master, hmmm... perhaps we should start to think of bringing him back. Plans for a Sontaran return were shelved a while back, to ensure we didn't clash with the TV series. But now that issue seems not to exist, it's certainly something we will be considering.

Been enjoying many of the BF DW CDs lately... but can I ask if you can keep an eye on the audio levels on the CD extras? They seem incredibly variable both within the interviews themselves and compared to the main features. I listen to them on the train and Tube and half the time

the extras (particularly the very polite but softly spoken David Richardson) are barely audible at all! Anyway, not a moan, just a suggestion.
Richard

Nick Briggs: Good point, Richard. We used to have a 'technical quality may vary due to impromptu nature of recordings' announcement on the CD Extras. The fact is that these are conducted very much on the hoof, so quality will vary. But I will talk to our editors and ask them to make sure the levels are more consistent. This will sometimes mean that there's a higher degree of hiss.

I've worked in deadline driven industries (advertising, design) for twenty years so I understand just how much pressure can come to bear when trying to meet time requirements but equally I also comprehend the irritation of customers when details get overlooked.

Big Finish do produce some excellent works of entertainment and I am only too happy to part money to enjoy them, but this year has certainly eroded my satisfaction as a customer. Incorrect orders, delayed orders without explanation, files without metatags, inconsistent approaches to download purchases, file server outages etc. To take the dramatic metaphor, don't look at this as a complaint but constructive criticism.

Regards,
Michael Evans

Nick Briggs: Michael, you are completely right. This has been a shameful year with regard to all those issues, and I would like to take this opportunity to apologize to all our loyal listeners who've had to put up with this substandard treatment. We are taking steps in the mail order department to put this right, and we are learning all the time with regard to file server 'outrages'. Our free download for *Doctor Who Magazine* was a testing ground for sorting out the problems we had with the Eighth Doctor downloads, and this seemed to work extremely well. Thank you to you all for your patience. We are doing our best to provide better service.

I am relatively new to Big Finish; I started getting **Doctor Who** stories when you started the download service. (Living in the US, the CDs were just too expensive.) I've mainly been buying from the first twenty-five since they are cheaper, and it has allowed me to try out all the Doctors relatively inexpensively. I recently took advantage of the *DWM* offer (since none of the ten were ones I had already bought).

Anyway, reading the news on the Big Finish site, I saw that starting in January, you would be doing three stories bringing back Elizabeth Klein as a companion for the Seventh Doctor. I had

just listened to *Colditz* (from the *DWM* offer) and thought this sounded interesting. Then I found out you were going to follow that with three stories teaming Colin Baker with Frazer Hines, which also sounded interesting. So I thought that maybe I could get a six-month download subscription, starting in January to get both three-story arcs.

If you click on the link for a six-month subscription, it says you can save almost £20 on a six-month download subscription. However, the US price for the six-month download subscription is \$75, while the price for new downloads is \$12.99. So six downloads costs \$77.94, meaning I would save a whopping \$2.94. I was wondering what the reason was for the price disparity? Also, as I understand it, I would not be eligible for the subscriber freebie, because I wouldn't be getting the December release. So what advantage do I get by subscribing? Am I missing something?

Brian Lintz

Nick Briggs: You are right, I'm very sorry to say you won't gain much of an advantage in this instance. The reason for this is that the US price for a download already represents a huge discount, so the discount that UK subscribers receive is not mirrored here. It's worth noting that when we announced that UK downloaders would pay £12.99 and US downloaders would pay \$12.99, a lot of UK customers complained that you were getting it so cheap! This is one of those 'can't please everyone all the time' problems. But rest assured you are getting the best deal we can afford to give you.

I bought the bumper back catalogue of **Bernice Summerfield** seasons one through five in your recent sale, and I am happily working my way through them. I am now getting to the point where I will run out soon. I am a subscriber to the main **DW** range (and some others) and would like to start with the **Benny** range, but I now have a gap between the end of season five and the current season ten. It is quite a jump in price for the complete season six (£45 vs £65 for one-five complete) and later seasons. Are there any plans to offer series six-ten at a fantastically reduced price so that people like me can catch up?

Thanks,
Dave Curran

Nick Briggs: Glad you've been enjoying the **Benny** plays. Plans for discounts are decided on an ongoing basis. Productions have to be sold at their retail price in order to make their money back and make further productions viable, which is especially the case for the **Benny** range (as its sales are comparatively low), so there are no plans to offer further discounted **Benny** seasons at present.



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CLASSIC DOCTORS
BRAND NEW ADVENTURES

HE'S DREDD, JIM!

Writer extraordinaire James Swallow discusses his array of Big Finish work so far, particularly his upcoming *Judge Dredd Crime Chronicles*



With this month's *Blood Will Tell*, you're taking on Old Stony Face again. How does it feel to be back in Mega-City One?

It's like I never left. I've been a reader of *2000 AD* from the halcyon days of *Prog #1*, and being able to write stories for Joe Dredd has always been a smooth fit for me.

What I love about the Judge Dredd world is that it's broad enough to span high-octane action, blunt comedy and serious drama, but at the same time never

lose the essential oddness of its setting. As a fan and a writer, it's great to have the chance to tell stories in such an arena.

What was the brief for your two stories?

I got a pretty free hand from John Ainsworth, our producer/director. Aside from the stipulation that we keep things inside the confines of Mega-City One (as we'd ventured further afield quite a bit in the other audio stories), I had no real restrictions of note. John told me he wanted one story where Judge Dredd was 'narrative' voice and one where Psi-Judge Cassandra Anderson was the lead, and then let me take it from there. I did make a personal choice early on though, to make these two tales a little darker in tone than the full cast plays I'd done before.

How does the *Companion Chronicles*-style format differ from past Dredd stories?

It's more intimate; I describe these 'enhanced audio readings' as being a halfway house between a full cast performance and a talking book. At some points it's a two-hander play, at others a single-voice reading, so it's neither one nor the other.

It's challenging to write in this style, but I think it also brings a fresh take to any story, giving it a different dynamic. I mentioned above that I wanted *Blood Will Tell* and *Double Zero* to be darker, and this style of performance lends itself well to that, with an internal character viewpoint and a more introspective narrative.

You got to write for Louise Jameson in *Double Zero*; did that impact how you wrote Judge Anderson?

I actually didn't even know Louise was in the frame to play Anderson until after the scripts were done and dusted, so it was a surprise to me when John told me she'd been cast for the role. When I was writing *Double Zero*, I had the 'classic' Anderson of the comics in mind, the character created by Mills and Wagner for the Dark Judges stories. I went back to the original issues that cemented her character traits and moved on from there.

Of course, Louise, with her experience playing a certain other kick-ass sci-fi heroine, is amply-suited to play the part...

Did you go to the recordings, and if so, what did you think of the performances?

I didn't get a chance to go up to Manchester for the recordings, sadly – something I regret,

because I love watching the whole process of the performance, and also because it's always such fun. I had no concerns about the acting, though, as I've worked with Toby Longworth on a number of projects and I don't have to be there to know he would be great; I also worked with Paul David-Gough on an earlier *Dredd* audio, so I knew he'd nail it, and of course Louise is always splendid.

But I missed out this time, because I always try to make sure that I get my voice in somewhere when I'm working on an audio, even if it's just a death-scream or a bit of background chattering. It's my Hitchcock moment.

You're a long-time Big Finish writer; what's your favourite range to work on and why?

Ooh, tough call... It's difficult to pick just the one; I'll always have a great fondness for the *2000 AD*/*Judge Dredd* stuff, because they were not only my very first Big Finish project, but also my very first professional audio dramas. The *Dredd* stories are wild and action-packed, and I'm immensely proud of the work we all did in that line; the *Doctor Who* stuff has a very different texture, a bit more cerebral, with a whole other dynamic; and then *Stargate* audios are different again, especially as they're all two-handers.

The thing is, I just love writing audio; it's a fantastic medium for science fiction storytelling, because you have the greatest special effects budget in the world, and it has all the best bits of scriptwriting and prose writing rolled into one.

Does your approach differ between writing full cast dramas, audiobooks and novels, or is it all just writing?

On the basic level, yeah, it's all just story when you get right down to it – but I think what changes is the mechanism of the narrative, the tools and tricks you have to play with in order to tell that story.

Prose fiction gives you near-total control of the narrative, whereas with an audio drama you lose a little of that, but you gain with the performances of the actors, the work of the director, the sound and music designer all being added to the project. Audiobook stories are a bit of both. At the end of the day, I like all the mediums, and it's an interesting challenge to write for each, to find the strengths and make them work for the betterment of your story.

What can you tell us about the long-awaited *Cyberman 2*?

Short answer? It's *grim*. *Cyberman 2* has been a while coming, what with production shifts and schedule changes, but I'm hoping that when it arrives, listeners will think the wait has been worth it. I'm very pleased to have had the chance to write this mini-series – you'll recall that the first four episodes all came from the pen of Nick Briggs, and so I was flattered that he felt he could trust me with a series and a cast of characters that he had created. I did my best to maintain the same tone he invested in series one, while expanding the storyline and bringing something of my own voice to it.

We pick up a few months after the end of the last series, and things on Earth are not going well, with the Cybermen on every street corner and populace living under an occupying army; meanwhile, the android faction at war with humanity has set in motion a decisive plan to wipe out its enemies once and for all – and in among all that we have three key characters who find themselves caught in the crossfire, and end up with the fate of the world in their hands.

What's next on your slate and what are you most excited about?

On the audio side of things I've taken on script editor duties for the next series of *Highlander* and *Stargate* CDs, as well as developing storylines for both the Black Library's new *Warhammer 40,000* talking book range and the ongoing reimagined *Blake's 7* series. Elsewhere, I've been doing some writing on a big videogame project and I've got a new novel in the planning stages. I'm excited about all of them; one of the great things about being a writer is that there are so many ways we can present our craft, and it's great having that opportunity at your fingertips.

Judge Dredd: Crime Chronicles - Blood Will Tell is out this month and *Double Zero* is out in January



MARK STRICKSON



Mark Strickson last played Vislor Turlough in 2005, in the Fifth Doctor play *Singularity*. Now he is back with a vengeance – having recorded two **Companion Chronicles** (*Ringpullworld* is out this month, *Freakshow* can be heard in 2010), while committing to join Peter Davison, Sarah Sutton and Janet Fielding for three full cast plays to be recorded at the end of the year. He tells **Vortex** all about it.

What do you think of the format of the *Companion Chronicles*?

Doctor Who seems to act like some magical creative compost. An endless supply of ideas spring from the original concept, and they all seem to work. **The Companion Chronicles** are no exception. The format gives both writers and actors a fantastic opportunity to explore the character of a companion and take them places they've never been before, both in terms of storylines and emotionally. Great stuff.

How easy or challenging is it to step back into the role of Turlough?

As most people will know, I was hardly walking when I first started playing the role of Turlough and I am still in the first flush of youth, so it's no problem at all. I have to say it's a great help having Peter around or one of my fellow companions. It's more difficult in the **Companion Chronicles**, but a good challenge.

Did you enjoy the fact that you also get to play the Doctor and Tegan too?

No, I'd much rather Peter and Janet were there. Not least because my Australian accent is totally rubbish. You'd think I'd be able to do a good Aussie accent, having lived and worked there for so many years. I can't. After a few words it starts drifting towards a strange mix of Birmingham, Welsh and Indian. Enjoy!

***Ringpullworld* had a lot of banter; *Freakshow* was more of a straight reading. Did you have any preference between the two styles?**

No, I liked doing both. In all honesty I was surprised how well *Ringpullworld* came off. It's one of those stories that starts as a slow-burner but sucks you in. *Freakshow* was just a lot of fun. We recorded the two stories across consecutive days. I'm currently living and working in New Zealand, so Big Finish tries to make the most of me when I'm in the UK. Having done all the voices in *Ringpullworld* I'd assumed I'd have to do the same for *Freakshow*, so I spent the previous night in a state of nervous exhaustion perfecting various accents. Mercifully, Australians were absent from the script. So, if you ever want Turlough to come back disguised as a Southern preacher, it would be my pleasure.

Does coming in to Big Finish rekindle your love of acting? I've never lost my love of acting. I guess I just wanted to save the world, did the zoology degree, started

making nature films and it hasn't stopped. I just went with the flow. I miss acting a lot and I miss my acting friends. In fact I miss England a lot so shall now have a quick break and cry into my beer. I periodically decide I'll take things a bit easier and do a mix of directing documentaries and acting, but then the next challenge comes along.

Tell us what you're up to as a producer these days...

For about fifteen years now I've been making nature and history documentaries, with a bit of cookery thrown in at one point. If you want to see my work, keep an eye on the credits on National Geographic, Discovery and Animal Planet – my three main clients. Currently you'll find **Killer Dragons** (about Komodo dragons, the biggest lizards in the world) playing on Nat Geo and **Dark Days in Monkey City** playing on Animal Planet (I developed this concept). I've just come back from Qatar filming wonderful Arab horses and saluki dogs and I'm also making a film on the wildlife of Korea's demilitarized zone – the no-go zone between North and South Korea. If I'm honest, I'm fairly addicted to getting on planes and having sometimes dangerous but always exciting adventures in exotic locations. Sorry about the global warming I'm causing but I hope the messages in my programmes are some compensation. I always bear in mind that I have a responsibility to enthuse viewers about the natural world and encourage them to care for it. Maybe it's my acting coming through, but I also make sure I entertain. No point in making something if nobody is going to watch it, however worthy the message.

What is your very first memory of being involved with *Doctor Who* on TV?

Sitting in a cottage in the village of Ilmington in the Cotswolds and watching the son of some friends of my parents appear in the programme. It was Tim Piggott-Smith, a member of UNIT in an episode featuring Pat Troughton and the Yetis, I think.



Neil Roberts, Mark Strickson and Alex Lowe at the Moat Studios for the recording of *Ringpullworld*

How well do you think the TV episodes stand up today?

I always dread seeing episodes that feature me, but am always pleasantly surprised how well they stand up. Once again it's testament to the strength of the **Doctor Who** concept.

Are you looking forward to recording the upcoming full cast plays with Peter, Sarah and Janet?

Very much indeed. I leave New Zealand on Boxing Day and arrive in the UK for my Mum's 80th birthday, which will be lovely. Then it's down to London to meet more old friends and have some fun acting. Sounds like a good time to me.

***Doctor Who - The Companion Chronicles - Ringpullworld* is out this month**



Alex Mallinson on... Lego

The feeling of pushing one's hands into a tub of Lego bricks and the sound it creates (it goes 'kish'... nothing else makes that sound) elevates me to some other plane. I can spend all day in a plastic trance. Six bricks can be assembled in 915 million combinations... I have thousands! The possibilities are dizzying. I just wish I could finish the models I start. My shelves are littered with orbital shuttles; a terraced house at Christmas in which minifigs are dying in horrific ways, their smiles never wavering; a giant futuristic Sinplex in which everything is for sale to the discerning (and always grinning) spaceman. They all gather dust in testament to my dilettantism. But still I buy new sets: pirate ships, Space Police cruisers and rock monsters battle for space with my half-baked efforts. I think it may be an addiction but when I shake the box and it goes 'kish-kish' I am transported back to a more innocent time.

David Richardson on... Saturday Nights

Now that staying in is the new going out, I have no reason to be ashamed of my addiction to Saturday night reality TV. In fact, I almost regard it as research – whenever there's a group of actors in the green room at the studio during the autumn months, conversation invariably turns to **Strictly Come Dancing** and **The X Factor**. And I can talk knowledgeably about these subjects, for hours if necessary. The singing twins? Don't get me started. Ricky Whittle's salsa? Truly excellent. And it's only three months until **Dancing on Ice**. Who says there's nothing on TV?

Toby Hrycek-Robinson on... The Best of Youth

Six solid hours of subtitled drama would normally induce severe stupor, but this very Italian drama spanning four decades rewarded every minute invested. An epic story told on an intimate scale, it's full of beauty, allegory and real emotion. A Fellini soap opera.

Barnaby Edwards on... Blu-ray

I have a congenital weakness for gadgetry of all kinds, from iPhones to ice cream makers, and my latest acquisition is already transforming my life. In short, I've gone Blu-ray. I shan't bore you with the details, but suffice it to say that the difference in quality between VHS and DVD is mirrored in the step up from DVD to Blu-ray. My favourite disc so far has to be the BBC's **Planet Earth**, which is simply breathtaking. Mind you, my opinion may change if they release **The Web Planet** on Blu-ray...

Alan Barnes on... The Liberty of Norton Folgate by Madness

I'm of an age where I could have loved Madness in their prime, but I always found the so-called 'Nutty Boys' deeply irritating. On this, their latest album, they channel the spirits of great London lyricists past – Ray Davies, Ian Dury, Chris Difford – to produce what's surely their finest and most mature work. *Sugar and Spice* and *NW5* make me dewy-eyed for the Norf London I grew up in, and *Dead London* fans will adore the title track, an ear-boggling chronicle of real and imagined Londons, past and present.

Paul Spragg on... Fringe

While Joss Whedon's **Dollhouse** gets analysed to death, the latest creation from fellow sci-fi mastermind JJ Abrams (**Alias**, **Lost**) has been quietly plugging away and becoming something rather special. Like **The X-Files** but without the pretension, and featuring imaginative and frequently horrifically squishy strange incidents, I could take or leave the first season. But a greater confidence, a firmer feeling of forward momentum and a growing enthusiasm for the characters has made a big difference and made **Fringe** one of the shows I most look forward to every week. Where else can you find crystallizing and exploding humans, trips to a parallel universe where the Twin Towers still stand and someone getting high off other people's dreams? Except possibly a late-night version of **Doctor Who**...

Jason Haigh-Ellery on... The X Factor

And I've done so well over the past few years: managed to kick my **Big Brother** habit, never watch **Corrie** or **Eastenders**, got away from **Britain's Got Talent**... All it takes is seeing one audition from Danyl Johnson and they drag me back in... **X Factor** – it's an addiction. Sigh...

Nick Briggs on... FlashForward

The latest potentially never-ending very-nearly-sci-fi US series to arrive on terrestrial TV in the UK. What can I say? It's crafted by US TV demons to make it as intriguing as possible. It's addictive and utterly absorbing. It's full of 'D'oh, why don't you just...?' moments and it's got Joseph Fiennes doing a great American accent. What's it about? The whole human race goes unconscious for precisely 137 seconds. When they wake up, there's been mayhem: planes have fallen out of the sky, people have died on operating tables... well, you can just imagine. But, most significantly, everyone has had a 'flash-forward' (geddit?) vision of the future. Everyone has seen a strangely edited, video-effected sequence of what they'll be doing in precisely six months' time. Some are having affairs with people they've never met, some are being tracked by gunmen, some see dead crows, some don't see anything at all – gasp, are they going to die? So our FBI hero Fiennes makes it his one-man mission to find out the truth. But the moral and psychological questions are fascinating. Whether or not it descends into a 'make it up as you go along' frustration-fest like other long-running US series, I can't tell. But just now, I'm loving it! I've set my BT Vision box (another thing I could wax lyrical about) to record the whole series.

Paul Wilson on... Keeping busy

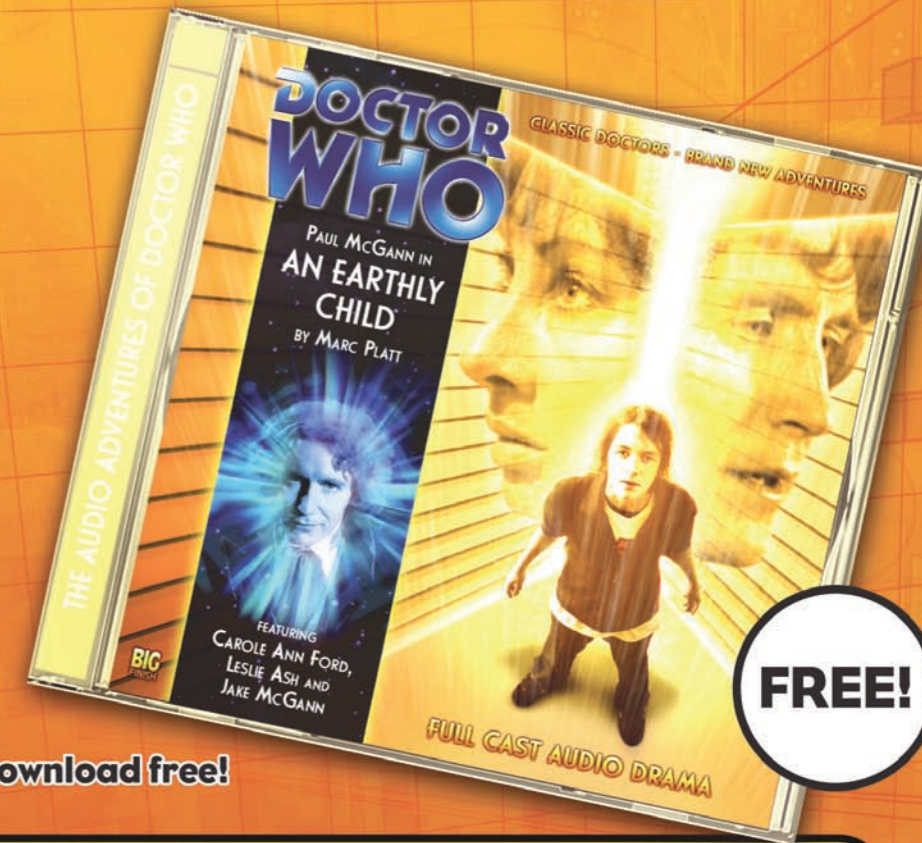
It's been a rather busy month for me, working on various projects over the course of the last few weeks, but by far the most exciting have been the microsites for both **Sherlock Holmes** and Rob Shearman's new book, *Love Songs for the Shy and Cynical* with Alex. I would love to say more, but then I wouldn't have anything to talk about next month – so watch this space!

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