

# Dress

for

# Success



Costume designer Louise Page tells DWM of the challenges of dressing showgirls, scarecrows, Time Lords and Tritovores over the past four years...

INTERVIEW BY BENJAMIN COOK



**F**ew people have contributed more to the look and feel of *Doctor Who* over the last four years than Louise Page. As the BAFTA Cymru Award-winning costume designer of no less than 45 episodes, from 2005's *The Christmas Invasion* to *The End of Time Part*

Two, her work encompasses David Tennant's entire run. She is credited on all but two of his episodes – the Doctor-lite *Blink* and *Turn Left*, although she still did some work on both – and has more individual *Doctor Who* stories to her name than any other costume designer in the show's 46-year history. Impressive, huh?

So, why has Louise Page decided to leave?

"I'm exhausted," she admits. "Nothing else is like *Doctor Who*. Nothing works at that pace, in that way. You don't get days off. I know people must think I'm mad to leave, but you can't stay anywhere forever. You have to know when to let go. I've loved the show. I've loved doing it. I've loved every mad moment of it. I've embraced it. It's been a truly incredible journey, and I've worked with the most talented, brilliant people, making some lifelong friends along the way. What more could a girl wish for? People have said, 'Wouldn't you have loved the challenge of designing another *Doctor*?' But I've been there now. Done that. I'm really proud of the *Doctor* that I've designed, and it's time to let someone else have a go."

From childhood, David Tennant knew that, when he grew up, he wanted to play the Doctor. Similarly, at ten years old, Louise announced to her mother and father – a legal secretary and textile agent respectively – that she wanted to be a costume designer, and *Doctor Who*, she says, was always her dream job. "My dad used to supply fur fabrics, mainly to the ladies' fashion trade," she explains, "but also to theatrical costume houses, such as Bermans & Nathans, and the BBC Costume Department. He definitely supplied the fur for the Wombles, and I'm pretty sure that, during the 60s, he supplied the fabric for the Yeti in *Doctor Who*. He always used to go on about those Yetis! I think that's what got me watching *Doctor Who*. My *Doctor* was Jon Pertwee."

In the school holidays, Louise used to help out at Bermans & Nathans. Later on, she attended Wimbledon School of Art, where she studied costume design. This led to a job as a costume buyer at the English National Opera (ENO), "working with amazing theatre and opera designers. The early 1980s was quite a groundbreaking time. We were doing all these big operas, such as Jonathan Miller's *Rigoletto*. I learnt more in that job than I ever did at art school, but I never really wanted to design for the stage. I wanted to do TV and film. That was my dream."

Louise left ENO in 1985, and ended up freelancing at Central Television, assisting light-entertainment designers. Her other design credits include George Lucas' *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*, 2005 romantic comedy *The Wedding Date*, and 2000's *Beautiful People*, which won the Prize Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival. But Louise never gave up on the Beeb: "For years, I applied to the BBC – three times, I think – and got rejected every time. I did get an interview, but in those days I looked like a cross between Spandau Ballet and Boy George. It was all quite outrageous.



Louise Page's dad provided fur to make the Yeti in the 1960s!

I remember them saying that they had two types of costume designer working at the BBC – the loud ones and the quiet ones – and that I'd intimidate both parties!"

It was 20 years after leaving ENO before Louise fulfilled her childhood ambition. "It's like no other job I've ever done," she says of *Doctor Who*. "It's everything that I wanted costume designing to be. It encompasses the past, the present, and the future. It can be period, but not period. Modern, but not modern. There is no right or wrong, except in your own mind. I tried to make my costumes timeless. When you look back at 1970s *Doctor Who*, some of the outfits that, for example, Lalla Ward [who played Romana, 1979-81] wore were so identifiable with that era; she looks like something off a 70s *Vogue* cover. In many years' time, maybe people will look at my designs and go, 'Oh, they're so dated,' but I hope not. I hope what I've done stands the test of time.

"My aim was always to give Russell [T Davies, former showrunner] his vision, and the challenge was to work out how to achieve it whilst also giving the director his or her requests, and the actor their character, through costume, and hopefully making them look great, and, if they're lucky, feel comfortable... all at the same time! It's like one giant jigsaw puzzle." Louise would often be the first point of contact for an actor once they had been cast. "I love actors. I think you have to, to spend the amount of time with them that I do. On *Doctor Who*, they were always so excited to be on board, and sometimes a little nervous.

"It didn't matter whether they had one line or a whole episode, I'd spend probably a whole morning shopping with them, trying to find the perfect costume. Some of them hated shopping, but we still had to do it. It'd be like some mad blind date. I'd say, 'Meet me in Selfridges Food Hall at ten. I'm the girl with the black clothes and the red lipstick.' Whilst fitting, I'd talk through any character notes I'd gleaned from Russell or the director, because the actor may not have seen the script yet. Although an actor may have had an idea about what they wished to wear, it was my job to steer them subtly in my direction!

"Most actors are a joy," she insists, "although sometimes we have to deal with their insecurities. ▶