**Time Lords, Hedgehogs, and Spoons: An evening with ‘the real McCoy’**

“I hated that little hedgehog! Upstaging little bastard!”

That is one of the many great quotes that Sylvester McCoy (born Percy James Patrick Kent-Smith!) came out with at the Union on Sunday. As Chair of the Doctor Who Society I had the privilege of spending some time with this amazing man.

Star of stage (as the Fool in King Lear opposite Cambridge’s own Sir Ian McKellen) and the big and small screens (as Radagast in the new Hobbit film series and as the Seventh Doctor in… well you should know!) he owned the floor, scurrying around with a hand-held mic, seeking out questions and plonking himself down on every available seat, and invariably falling off it.

He regaled us with tales from being a stuntman, stuffing ferrets down his trousers and setting fire to his hair, and how the he was saved from concussion whilst riding Radagast’s Rosgobel rabbits (he rolls his ‘r’s so just imagine that last sentence!)

A highly underrated incarnation in the ever expanding pantheon of Doctors, he pointed out that even though the show may have gone on hiatus during his watch, many of the ideas that started in his episodes heavily influenced how they made the new series.

After a brief rendition of the Doctor Who theme tune whilst he played the spoons on various animate and inanimate objects, I got the chance to interview him. Trying to contain the fan-boy inside, and completely failing, we had a much more calm and reflective chat about things.

**In Cambridge, the only fantasy worlds that have societies devoted to them are Doctor Who and Tolkien, between which you are the bridge. Why do you think science fiction and fantasy has got such a large following?**

*Well, science-fiction and Doctor Who attracts a lot of people, and I think it’s because it gives them hope for the future. They can fantasise and imagine a better place. I see it when I go to conventions; people can lose themselves in those stories, and write about it and discuss it. I mean you don’t get that with detective novels; people read them and love them but it’s not got the same feeling you know. It kind of fulfils, I mean, I don’t want to sound too pompous, but a spiritual kind of need that people have. I think we all need spirituality, that’s why we invented religions, to fulfil this thing that we’ve got, and I think sci-fi and fantasy fulfils that need.*

**Going back in time (see what I did there…) and speaking of spirituality, you (and interestingly the Fourth Doctor Tom Baker) trained to be priests initially? Do you have fond memories of that time?**

*I have nothing but great memories of it really. I went when I was 11, mainly not because I had any deeply religious want, but it was a bet or to show off to someone! It was way up in the highlands near Aberdeen, and it was cold, bleak and drab, but I loved every moment of it! And the reason was, although we were locked in, it introduced me to the whole wide world. We used to have, once a month in the refectory someone read to us, which I used to love. I remember he used to read us travel books, and you know, I was there, I was travelling, even though I was in the highlands. It saved me and if I’d stayed in Dunoon I don’t know what I would have become really. It wasn’t an easy place for sparky people to be in. Here’s a story: my Uncle had a record player, and it was broken, and I was good with electricity so I fixed it, and I said to him, “Could I borrow that for a bit because I’ve got an LP I’d like to listen to.” And he was like, “Ooh what is it then?” And I said “It’s Tchaikovsky’s 1812”, and he took it out of my hands and said, “Who do you think you are? That’s not the music for people like us. Are you trying to put yourself up above us?” It was a kind of reverse snobbery. So it wasn’t a good place for someone who was trying to explore the world, or trying to make himself intellectually sharper.*

**At the end of one of your Doctor Who episodes you are seen hanging off a cliff by your umbrella…**

*It was my idea, by the way. I came into the set and saw it and said “Oh I could hang off that, and then we’d have a real toot; a literal and a figurative cliff-hanger!”*

**How did you train to perform these various stunts in Doctor Who and earlier on in your life?**

*I just said yes! I mean I did read a book called ‘How to bang a nail up your nose’.*

**You said before how you feel like the sunshine follows you, and you always try remain upbeat about things. All Cambridge students have exams this term and it’s very stressful. Have you got any tips, to make that sun shine, and keep happy in those stressful times?**

*Oh, I don’t know, open a bottle of wine! What could I say, that’s a difficult one. You’ve just got to think that there’s a light at the end of that tunnel; you’ll get through it. If you focus completely on what you’re doing, and let nothing else distract you it’ll be gone, over before you know it. Does that make sense? Either that or watch lots of Doctor Who.*

Don’t mind if I do… So, after a quick signing session and a selfie (sorry, I had to indulge myself!) we took off to a restaurant with some other Union officials and had a meal, over which we discussed how forks got their name, how Jesus may have been a Time Lord, and I think I had a sort of ‘weird face face-off’ with him across the table, but I may have been imagining it!

So there we have it. Sylvester McCoy, one of the funniest and most mischievous of entertainers, but one of the most genuinely kind and insightful men I’ve ever met. So, let the sun shine both literally and figuratively over this Easter term, and don’t get upstaged by CGI hedgehogs!