

"THE AVENGERS"

"THE AVENGERS" has a long history as a popular, yet different adventure series. It was first seen on television in Britain in 1960. At that time it was called POLICE SURGEON and starred Ian Hendry in the role of a police surgeon whose girlfriend has been gunned down in the street. His career as an avenger of all things evil began from that incident.

Patrick Macnee entered the series as John Steed in a supporting role (originally for a three month period) and the name of the program was changed to THE AVENGERS. Ian Hendry continued in the series for the next nine months. The original POLICE SURGEON/AVENGERS was a live, cops-and-robbers TV series directed by Peter Hammond. Hammond gave the series its unusual visual effect by using stylized German shooting techniques in the genre of Fritz Lang.

It was Sydney Newman, now a special adviser on film policy to the Secretary of State here in Canada, THE AVENGERS' second director, who came up with the idea of a woman as a sidekick for Macnee/Steed. "But not an ordinary woman. Up to that time in such TV series, women were either wives or secretaries or sex objects, but not women who used their minds, made decisions, or took part in the action."

Honor Blackman played the first female AVENGER, Cathy Gale, and it was Macnee's idea that she dress in black leather, a move which proved both unusual and sensational. Cathy Gale was an anthropologist, an expert photographer, mechanic and driver. She was skilled in judo and proficient with firearms.

Subsequent female AVENGERS were Diana Rigg as Emma Peel, Linda Thorson (a Canadian) as Tara King and the present Steed sidekick, Joanna Lumley as Purdey.

The original AVENGERS series featured such stars as Donald Sutherland, Nigel Davenport, Charlotte Rampling, Moira Lister, Christopher Lee, Gordon Jackson and Peter Cushing.

There were six years between the final episode of THE AVENGERS in 1969 and the day when Patrick Macnee was approached to star in THE NEW AVENGERS. Macnee says that at the time he had some reservations, "but when I did get some scripts I realised they were better than ever before."

Macnee continues: "THE NEW AVENGERS storylines are great, and the action is terrific. Much of the recent TV I've seen seems sadly lacking in high-powered action. I think what we've got this time is a thriller show with comic undertones."

THE NEW AVENGERS, which cost L4,000,000 to produce, stars Joanna Lumley as Purdey and Gareth Hunt as Mike Gambit, Steed's new sidekicks.

Purdey, in the tradition of former female AVENGERS, is a trained ballerina, born in India and educated internationally. She is an expert shot, a competent driver and studied Chinese martial arts in Peking. Mike Gambit is an ex-mercenary/army major/racing driver. He is an expert shot, good athlete and is skilled in various methods of unarmed combat.

Steed, of course, is still Steed. A little older, a little wiser and a little more mellow. But just as dapper and dignified.

"THE NEW AVENGERS" is being produced by Albert Fennell and Brian Clemens of Avengers Enterprises Ltd. in association with Rodolph Roffi of IDTV-TV, Paris. CTV and Nielsen-Ferns Inc. will, of course, be involved in the next set of 13 episodes.