



**JOANNA
LUMLEY**



Is it true that you were offered the role of Hannah Wild in the stage production of THE AVENGERS?

It's true that I auditioned for it, but I remember that I was turned down because I was an unknown at the time and, because the male lead they'd chosen also wasn't very well known, they decided to go for someone more famous and in fact, they chose Sue Lloyd.

How did you first learn that they were looking for a new AVENGERS girl? Can you give some insight into what you were required to do during the screen test and audition?

In the same way that everybody learns these things, through my agent and friends who had been up for it. It was very difficult for me because apparently they didn't want me and I couldn't even get into the audition - it took forever and ever getting to meet them. Once I had done so, I had to go for three tests: one was reading, and the other two were physical auditions ... one was playing a scene and, because they had already chosen Gareth by that time, I did it with him on film. The second was a big fight with a stunt man to see if I could actually do it ... I remember being immensely stiff after that.

As the role would obviously prove very physical, were you given any special training prior to filming? (It was reported in the media that you had been given a Commando-style training course.)

Yes, we were given training - an enormous amount of training, and an olympic crash course to reduce our heartbeat from whatever it is - between 70 and 80 or 60 and 70 or something - right down to 50 ... which is rather like Bjorn Borg's heartbeat. I can remember those days as being just gruelling. We started off every morning with about three hours of it and I also had to do some ballet training because Purdey had been a dancer.

Was the Purdey role already 'fleshed-out' on paper, or did the character evolve during the production and after discussions with the producer? How much of the character was you?

The character wasn't really 'fleshed out' - there was no original image. They simply gave me the bare bone and said "flesh her out", so I decided to keep as much of myself in Purdey as was possible - haircut, name etc., so that it would be easier to maintain an even playing of the part if I decided to have some strange quirk I'd forgotten in episode twenty-one - that wouldn't have looked quite so good.

Was there ever any suggestion that Purdey follow previous AVENGERS girls and wear leather?

No. They decided to get her out of leather and into ... well, there was a bit of a kind of flux about this - nothing to do with me, I might add - but some people, wanted her to wear stockings and suspenders; some wanted her to wear frilly things. This was all out of my range because I kept saying I thought that if she really was the most effective sleuth in the world, or part of some enormous secret service, then she would have to wear very efficient and sportsman-like clothes ... which is why, in answer to your following question

Pre-publicity for THE NEW AVENGERS led us to believe that Purdey would be "a stockings and suspenders girl". Stocking tops and suspender tabs were, however, conspicuous by their absence - why?

..... when they said she's going to be a stockings and suspenders girl, I - well, that was gradually filtered out, because you try climbing over a barbed-wire fence or shimmying up a drainpipe and scaling a roof wearing high heels and suspenders well, I had to do a lot of it, and it was bloody lucky I didn't break my ankle!

You've been quoted as saying that you have no head for heights. How did this affect the numerous rooftop scenes you were required to perform in the show? (e.g. Climbing the drainpipe and 'roof-hopping' in "Target". The long tracking shot of Purdey running the length of the gantry in "Sleeper".) Am I correct in assuming that the latter was done in one take? Did you receive any injuries as a result of doing your own stunt work?

I just had to do it. Yes, I did them, and the latter was done in one take. I didn't receive any injuries from the stuntwork I did, because I trained very carefully. It was overseered by Ray Austin, and I worked with most of the top stuntmen in England. I steeled myself to do the stunts because - well, for a start, it is much more interesting if you're an actress being involved with all the filming rather than sitting down and watching someone else do all the juicy bits. I remember the stunts I didn't do were those on motorbikes - because I can't ride a motorbike, and they couldn't cover me with insurance.

Did you enjoy working with Patrick Macnee and Gareth Hunt?

I loved working with Patrick and Gareth. They were the most enormous help and still remain very, very close friends.



Did Patrick offer any useful suggestions for the Purdey character?

No, because like many of the finest actors, the last thing he would do is tell you how to play your part. I might have asked him how to play a particular scene, but he never, ever told me how to play Purdey.

Can you recall any amusing anecdotes that arose while working on the series? (e.g. It was rumoured that you had a couple of mishaps while riding the motorcycles, and you once floored a stuntman with a mis-timed kick.)

I've already covered that one. I didn't ride the motorcycles, so I don't know where that one sprung from?

No, I didn't, but I remember that Gareth once punched out a stuntman. Either the stuntman was in the wrong position, or Gareth mistimed the punch, hit the man on the chin and knocked him out. He went down two flights of stairs - backwards, so that wasn't much fun. Thank God, I never had any 'grim' times.

Did you receive any 'odd-ball' fanmail as a result of working on the series? Other AVENGERS stars have acknowledged that they received 'odd' - sometimes 'sick' mail, and Honor Blackman was frequently asked to "come outside" or attend parties - provided she carried her whip!

No, mercifully, none at all. I've had the most enchanting letters, which still continue to arrive from all parts of the world. I think that quite a lot of it was due to the fact that Purdey was a much lesser - how shall I put it - a much less aggressive character than the other girls had to be, because in those days, there was just Patrick and the woman and they had to work as an even team, while in The New Avengers, with Gareth being such a strong man and Patrick being a strong, older, wiser man, I didn't have to be quite so aggressive, and so I think that people possibly saw me as less of a threat - and therefore the letters were kinder.

Presuming finance could be found, would you like to do another series of THE NEW AVENGERS - or perhaps a feature length TV movie?

It's so difficult to answer that question because, while we all loved doing it, most shows, or plays, or films, or series, have a lifespan of their own and while The New Avengers probably may have had a bit of life left in it, The Avengers themselves have been going since 1960. Well, it's now 1985, and I think that it's probably better to leave people remembering them with affection rather than being inundated with yet more of them as we, ourselves, get older and older ... and probably not quite as effective.

SAPPHIRE AND STEEL was a unique idea - though somewhat confusing at times. Did David McCallum and yourself really understand just what was going on - who/what the characters were?

Well, this is one of the problems we found. If people didn't watch almost all the episodes with the keenest of interest, they did get lost. However, we found that a lot of old people, who had the time perhaps to concentrate, and a lot of young people - really young, right down to quite young children, who followed the stories with rapt attention, never got 'lost'.

It was always the middle-aged - by that I mean perhaps young to sort of fifty-year olds - who'd watch a bit of the story then dash out and make a cup of tea - or perhaps miss an entire episode, who wondered why they couldn't follow the story.

I thought it was a marvellous idea - and beautifully written.

Did you enjoy working with David McCallum?

Yes, I enjoyed working with David - he's a fine actor, hugely intelligent and very professional.

To answer your previous question: Did we understand the series? Yes, of course we did - otherwise we couldn't have done it ... although we had to concentrate terribly hard: we were, for instance, flying backwards and forwards in time, or using the same set - which was in three periods of time! But we simply couldn't have done it if we didn't understand what we were doing.

Were contact lenses used to achieve the 'steel blue' eyes effect? If so, was there any time limit has to how long these could be worn?

Yes, absolutely, although we hoped they were sapphire blue rather than steel blue. I had never worn contact lenses before, so they fitted me up with a pair that hadn't got lenses in them because I don't need glasses, so these were made specially for my eyes. They were clear, and to make them blue we had to add a liquid rather like ink - a sort of blue eyedrop, which was then absorbed into the lens and made them blue. Then we entered into a very, very complicated technical process arrangement where camera back-projection was fed through the eyes and so on, but it was done, on the whole, with contact lenses.

As Sapphire and Steel were never actually killed off, but left 'suspended' in space and time, are there any plans to revive the series?

I don't know. I think it's rather bad as the force which they were always combatting, managed to



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sort of, well, snare them in that window out there up in the sky. I think, however, that that is where they'll remain. Funnily enough, of *The New Avengers* or *Sapphire and Steel*, I felt that *Sapphire and Steel* would have probably made the better feature film ... particularly using the immense advances we've made in technical film making which has been done so beautifully in things like *Star Wars* and *Alien*. I think we could have probably made a most exiting film ... although there are no plans to do so.

Is it correct to assume that you 'dubbed' the voices of other actresses in *ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE*?

No, absolutely not! I remember that there was a crowd scene where the other actresses - who'd all come from different countries around the world - had gone back home, and I was the only one there and so I had to make sort of noises off in a German voice, or Australian voice, or whatever voice, and make a 'hint' of a crowd scene. So I did do one or two crowd scenes for the girls, but I certainly never dubbed them.

Can you give us some insight into your future plans? Have you any more books in the pipeline? (Your "Spectator Book Of Competitions" was superb.)

No! (Joanna laughs) I live day to day, and never know by tomorrow what is coming up. I have got - brewing away in my head, the ideas for several things - a screenplay, a stage play, and a book. When - or whether I start or finish them, remains to be seen. As for acting. What I've already done - though they have yet to be seen, are *The Glory Boys* for Yorkshire Television, and I've just completed filming *Mistral's Daughter*, which was made by CBS for network showing on American television. I play an American woman in that - not a very large part though.

If you were given a blank cheque and carte blanche to produce ANY subject, what would it be - and why?

I suppose it might be to encourage some of the young writers I know to complete their scripts. To put on a good production of a play in a theatre to, well, encourage - I think that's what I'd like to do. I'd particularly love to improve the standard of writing in Great Britain, because we have, without any doubt, as finer producers, directors, actors and technicians, as any where else in the world, and I think we've probably been let down - although we have some fine writers - by the standard of our screen writing.

Finally, have you any message that you'd like to share with our readers?

Dear reader, I'm so very, very touched for a start, you you would have payed any attention to this interview when it is transcribed into writing. I send you all my very best wishes, and I'd like to add to that the affectionate thanks of Patrick, Gareth and David McCallum - without whom, of course, I wouldn't have been anything, and to say how very much we appreciate your endless support and enthusiasm. I hope that we continue to please and entertain you in the future. Thank you so much, and thank you, Dave, for requesting this interview.
