

Kaye Adams:

Now in its 60 year history, Doctor Who has scored lots of hearts and last week saw Ncuti Gatwa become the first doctor to use British Sign Language. Also starring was deaf actor and strictly winner, Rose Ayling-Ellis. It's being held as a huge positive step for inclusivity. But with one in three of us having some form of hearing loss or deafness, is there more to be done? I'm pretty sure the answer to that is going to be yes. TV critic, Scott Bryant, with us. Hi there, Scott morning, good morning. Also in the studio with me. I am delighted to have Mitchell Graham, who is a project manager at Deaf Action Scotland. And alongside Mitchell is Megan, who is his interpreter. And you would not believe the rate at which these two communicate with each other. It is absolutely dazzling. I am totally, totally transfixed. But Scott, I've got, I've got something on in the studio here, unfortunately, you're not able to see us. But tell us a bit more about this Doctor Who episode then.

Scott Bryant:

I mean, I will try to be light on spoilers. But essentially, of course, Doctor Who back with Russell T Davis as show runner. Ncuti Gatwa in the lead role, and what you had was an episode which ended up actually being a sequel to a previous episode from about 10 years ago, sort of focused on Rose Ayling-Ellis' character who uses British Sign Language. I can't really tell too much about her character, because there is a twist in regards to it, but she is a central character, and she's just using it, using BSL, just throughout the episode and Ncuti Gatwa well because of the TARDIS' ability of basically being able to pick up any language. He's able to also use sign language too. And Ncuti, there's a behind the scenes video recorded on the BBC and Ncuti, he was talking about how he learned BSL specifically for that role. But it's something that I think is happening across TV, not just in Doctor Who itself. A few weeks ago, there was a excellent drama called reunion, which also starred Rose Ayling-Ellis, along with a sort of a really great sort of set of stars, most of whom are either using BSL or are deaf. And it managed to be a really original sort of crime thriller, but managing to tap into a lot of the issues being faced by the deaf community in regards to, in particular, in this case, as to justice. But it was kind of using the issues faced by the community as a kind of second point, whilst focusing primarily on it being a sort of high stakes drama first. So you learnt a lot, but it didn't feel like being (inaudible) too if that makes sense.

Kaye Adams:

Yeah, and, well, I was going to say, I imagine that is, that is important. Mitchell is, of course, the person to ask about that. I guess it's always going to be good to see BSL being used on screen. Mitchell.

Mitchell Graham:

Yeah, definitely, 100% it really shows that there's more inclusivity for the deaf community. Feel like we are on an equal playing field to our hearing peers. And BSL is such a rich language, it should be recognised like in any forms of theater screen, whatever it is.

Kaye Adams:

Yeah. I mean, do you think you have seen a sort of leap forward in recent times. And I mean Rose Ayling-Ellis is an amazing ambassador, isn't she?

Mitchell Graham:

Yes 100% she's a great ambassador. We've seen lots of different shows that include more deaf actors in it that are on the screen, and she shows that they are developing compared to way back then. You know that Rose, you know that she was in Strictly Come Dancing, and since then, she's been in so many things. So recently she was in Reunion, like you mentioned, that was fantastic to see, and now in Doctor Who that we've got a clip where they're using BSL, which is fantastic, and it's funny, I've

been watching the clip, and I see that they're using BSL first before they actually bring the captions on. So I was like, I feel like I'm on an equal playing field here.

Kaye Adams:

Yeah, the point that Scott makes, I haven't seen Reunion, actually, so you're ahead of me on that, but that the use of BSL, and, you know, exploring various aspects that affect the deaf community was the second point, as Scott says, rather than this is all about representation. It was actually just a cracking drama. Is it important that that balance has struck?

Mitchell Graham:

Oh definitely, 100% I think balance is really important to show that everybody's like, we're not excluded. We can do everything that we want to do. We are equal to everybody else, everybody who is hearing.

We can do exactly the same thing. The only difference is we use a different language.

Kaye Adams:

I mean, Scott, do you think I mean, has something happened within the film and TV industry that has made it more aware of the of the need to be more representative?

Scott Bryant:

I think sort of several things have happened at once. Really, I think there has been a effort behind the scenes in TV production to make it more inclusive. There have been real sort of power forces within the industry, such as Jack Thorne, who set up an initiative called Tap to improve accessibility in terms of production, which in turn affects the types of shows that ended up being made. I think also, we are seeing improvements also in terms of accessibility and access requirements, in terms of subtitling, in terms of interpreters, in terms of audio description. Throughout different programming too, there has been kind of more of an effort, I think, by certain streaming services to go and sort of improve them, because there had been complaints before, a few years ago that things were not really where they should be. And of course, if the access requirements are not there, then many people are not able to watch programs. But personally, I still think a lot needs to be done. I think it is a challenge in regards to regulation, and that was a bit a bit dry to bring up. But in terms of like Ofcom, the regulator, they currently look after some streaming services, and they impose rules with how much programming should be having interpreters and along with BSL, whilst others are not under the its remit yet. So they sort of see it on a voluntary basis. So I think it's a bit case by case. We're not seeing uniformity. But I say it makes, it makes such a big difference to have all of these programs, not just in terms of having actors within them, behind the camera, so in front of the camera, but also in terms of having, you know, the ability, the access requirements, so that people can enjoy these programs in the first place.

Kaye Adams:

And Mitchell, would you? Would you agree? I mean, this is it's encouraging to see dramas like Dr Who, Reunion embracing BSL, but what more would you like to see happen?

Mitchell Graham:

Really, I think I just want to add on to that, as to representation, to change the attitude of everybody in society. I think the more hearing audiences are seeing this, it becomes valuable, like as seen as normal, as people are used to seeing Deaf people, rather than being like, oh, people are using sign language. What are they doing? If people are seeing this on a regular basis on a screen, like on your TV, it's going to become normal for people.

Kaye Adams:

I suppose there's also the point that British Sign Language, your automatic response is, well, that's something that people who are deaf or have a hearing problem would use. Would you like to see British Sign Language being used more widely, or just an awareness of it?

Mitchell Graham:

Oh, definitely. 100% would want to see more BSL use around the UK daily, especially in like emergency scenes or anything like that. Or education, it should always be included. And it means that, especially for grassroots deaf community or young deaf people that are learning that's part of their journey now they're growing up. Now, think about their future. We want to make sure it's more accessible for them. So you're saying that TV's got captions and everything. We want to make sure it is more accessible for these younger people that are going to grow up and it's going to be their future.

Kaye Adams:

Well, listen. Thank you very much for coming in, Mitchell Graham, who's a Deaf Action Project Manager and interpreter Megan. As I say, you have educated me today. The two of you, the way that you communicate is incredible. And actually it was one of the things that I'm running over time, and I'm going to get around, but I'm going to as I remembered it, Mitchell is one of the things that Ncuti Gatwa said, which really struck me that he said in his experience of learning British Sign Language, he realised that his communication had to be very focused, and it changed the quality of his communication, which I thought was a lovely observation from him.

Mitchell Graham:

Oh definitely, definitely. I think it's great that he's able to express that and he's already learning signing, which is a hard thing to learn. It's a skill to be able to learn that, to learn that language. Think about the structure, because it's not the same as English at all, as of its own language and its own right. And you need to be able to understand that to be able to use it.

Kaye Adams:

Well, listen. Thank you so much. Mitchell Graham, Megan, and Scott, thank you as ever.