

'Dark Shadows' returns to TV as miniseries, series

Jean Simmons plays Collins matriarch

By Mary Ann Townsend

Producer Dan Curtis recreates and updates his eerie tale of the Collins clan that ran on daytime television for five years when "Dark Shadows" aired as a four-hour miniseries Sunday and Monday, Jan. 13 and 14, then later as a series, on NBC.

Ben Cross portrays venerable vampire Barnabas Collins, and Jean Simmons plays Elizabeth Collins Stoddard, the matriarch of Collinwood, an isolated New England manor house. The series chronicles the mysterious events that begin in Collinsport, Maine, following the arrival of long-lost relative Barnabas and Governess Victoria Winters, played by Joanna Going ("Another World").

Oscar-nominated British actress Simmons has been a fan of the show since it aired on daytime TV in the '60s.

"My children and I would watch it daily. I mean before homework, before anything. They'd come home from school, we'd all sit down and watch 'Dark Shadows.' We were great fans, great fans. And I thought this would be fun to do. Mind you I've always wanted to play a kind of madame vampire of a whole house. This may be the closest I can come to it."

That coming from a reserved actress who received her first Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Ophelia opposite Sir Laurence Olivier's "Hamlet."

The actress said the opportunities for the show are limitless, and one thing she looks forward to is the possibility of exploring different time periods.

"Maybe (in) a couple of segments they could fang me up or something. I don't know. They're trying to look forward because there's so many directions they could go with all the characters in the show," she said.

An added bonus, she said, is working with a cast of talented performers. In addition to Cross and Going, "Dark Shadows" also stars Roy Thinnes and Barbara Steele.

"The producer got a bunch of actors together and it was just great, all professionals and fun to be with, which I gather doesn't always happen in a series all the time," Simmons said. "And the kids in it are just terrific, very professional, and fun to be with."

And what does Simmons think of the actor who plays Barnabas?

"Ben Cross is to die over. Do you remember him in 'Chariots of Fire'? Oh, a wonderful actor and very funny — a great sense of humor."

Although some of the storylines may sound funny on paper, with vampires and werewolves gallivanting about, the updated version of the show has the same serious, Gothic tone as the original.

Part I catches first-time viewers up with the basic plot: Barnabas Collins is released from the family crypt and becomes reacquainted with his modern-day relatives.

In Part II on Monday, he has agreed to try out an anti-vampire serum because he has fallen in love with distant relative Victoria Winters. However, he is constantly fighting his lust for blood.

As for the outcome of the four-hour miniseries? Tune in Friday Jan. 18, when the tales of Barnabas Collins continue in a weekly series.

THURSDAY



Don Murray and Wil Wheaton play a father and troubled teen in "My Dad Can't Be Crazy ... (Can He?)" an ABC Afterschool Specials presentation, Thursday.