

Judi Trott enjoyed hanging out in the forests with Robin Hood.

Marian of Sherwood

By JEAN AIREY

A TV series featuring a mixture of graphic adventure and high fantasy demands a female lead with similar qualities of guts and ethereal presence. The producers of *Robin of Sherwood* cast Judi Trott as their Maid Marian, and the affection of Robin Hood's band of delinquent troublemakers for the wisp of a young woman was credible from her first moment on screen.

Familiar with the Robin Hood legend, Trott had loved the film *Robin and Marian* with Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn. "That was my ideal Robin Hood and Maid Marian." But she didn't expect that the series she was auditioning for would be of a similar caliber. "I knew very little about it. I thought it was going to be a very childish series, for four o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon."

Her eyes widen in astonished memory. "I didn't see a script or anything until the



Photo: Jean Airey

second or third time they interviewed me. I really didn't know that it was going to have a different sort of profile than what had gone before. It worried me. I don't know where I got my caution from so far back, but I remember saying to my agent, 'I don't know anything about this, and this is a three-year contract! I don't want to be tied to anything.' " Now, she continues wryly, "I would give my eye teeth for something like that, but then I felt it might be a bit—tying."

She certainly wasn't prepared for life out on location as the only female "continuing" regular. Raised with all sisters, Trott emphasizes that her childhood was far from rough and tumble. "I was just the opposite." In early childhood, an obvious talent coupled with the requisite pitbull determination to succeed sent her off to the Royal School of Ballet, where the training was wonderful, but the experiences of dealing with the opposite sex were somewhat limited. "It's a very narrow sort

of existence. We had boys there, but they were few and far between, and I was always the tallest person. All the boys were little," she gestures about three feet off the floor, "and I was always self-conscious with them. I went into the [London Studio Centre] and there were only a handful of men there. I didn't have a boy friend. I was shy of the opposite sex. At the beginning, I was intimidated by this group of men."

If she was indeed intimidated, she didn't run and hide, but set out to overcome her feelings. She smiles and, typically, downplays her own accomplishment. "I don't know what happened during that first series. I suppose for the first time I came out of myself and I just actually grew up! I lost that fear of the male company. I had done a film just previous to getting the *Robin* contract, playing one of the leading girls. I had to be a very smart and wise girl, which I wasn't at that time! It was very difficult for me. I didn't stop blushing the whole of the shoot. I was shaking and blushing and *everybody* knew that you only had to say, 'Judi, what do you think?' and I would be absolutely scarlet."

"I came from that straight into *Robin Hood*. I just think the boys rubbed all the edges off me. They were so *natural* with me that I lost all my fear. They were like brothers, and I just lost my nervy edge." But the whole experience made it easier for her "to go and deal with people. It was a good experience for me to learn to get on with different types of people, because everybody in the acting world comes from different walks of life. It's not like dancing, where everyone has a similar background. In acting, you're thrown together and you have to get on for long periods of time. You break down the barriers so quickly when you're acting. You have to," she laughs delightedly, "especially when as leading lady, you have to kiss your leading man the first day."

Sherwood Actress

Robin of Sherwood further complicated the "leading man" question by casting first



Judi Trott appreciates the time she spent with *Robin of Sherwood*. "It was such an unusual show."



The actress thought both Michael Praed (left) and Jason Connery were “mature” Robins of Sherwood when it came to handling romantic scenes.

Michael Praed and then Jason Connery as Trott's love interest. She credits Richard “Kip” Carpenter, series creator and writer (STARLOG #151), for making the situation an easy one. “It was much easier because they weren’t playing the same part, which was Kip Carpenter’s idea and the best way around it. One was Robin of Locksley and the other was Robert of Huntingdon. They were two different people. I felt that for Marian, it had to be a very, very slow process of getting to know Robert of Huntingdon. I *couldn’t* let myself fall into any of the traps—pretending it was Michael. There had to be a certain wariness, and feeling a detachment, looking at this new character and waiting for him to prove himself. As Marian, I felt obviously that’s how she *would* be. She couldn’t jump into a relationship until she knew that person.”

But before she could build up a rapport with the new “Robin,” the young actress found herself a critical part of the selection process. “We always knew they were going to audition someone else. They just said straight away that boys were coming in to audition with me.” She was asked to do screen tests with the actors on the narrowed-down ‘short list.’ “I did a lovey-dovey scene from the first series. I can remember sitting in a field doing it. It’s one of the ones where Robin is trying to persuade Marian to come into the forest. It was very difficult getting a response from the men, getting them to actually show the romance,” she says in amazement. “They could do all the swashbuckling bit, but when it came to the kiss or looking seriously into each other’s eyes, saying, ‘I love you’ or

whatever, a blanket would go up,” she gestures, covering her eyes. “Because they’re very young, like maybe 22 or 23, and that was quite difficult for a young man to act. Michael, no problem,” she shrugs. “Jason, no problem, but many of them in between actually found that quite—well, I thought,” she considers carefully, obviously refraining from implying too harsh a judgment. “They withdrew a *bit*.” She continues, laughing, “It’s hard to get real romance! I think mature men find that much easier!”

She also found herself increasingly challenged on the physical front. “We had to learn swordplay for the swordfights. I was never very good at it—they used clever camera angles, so it looked good. I never did any of the really dangerous stuff, just lots of little things, jumping off things, landing on boxes. Great fun when you’ve done it the first time! Once you’ve done it, you want to get up there and do it again.”

Action Actress

Trott was asked to learn not just archery, but was called on to shoot arrows tipped with fire. “I’m frightened of fire,” she confides. Fears and inexperience didn’t stand in her way, although she had to work to get very good at it. “It took a while,” she laughs. “The first series I was really nervous. The funny thing was I could do it quite well, and I got on very well with the archery teacher. I had a nice sort of position—because of the dancing—but then I would get extremely nervous when the cameras rolled. It was annoying—the fact that I knew I could do it, but I couldn’t

when everybody was looking at me, *especially* when they put fire on the arrows.”

The fire arrows were a problem not just because of the fear she was fighting to control, but because of the props’ scarcity. “There were always a limited number of ones you could use—like two each—and you had to get it right. My fingers used to just go all sweaty and I used to get really scared!” Her own fear, she found, was shared by the camera crews. “They used to put plastic around the cameras so nobody would get hurt, although many of the arrows had rubber tips. But, they used to barricade themselves in when they knew I was going to be firing an arrow! Once, I went over the barrier. It was a *beautiful* shot—went miles! Some spark [electrician] was sitting in his generator some 200 yards away and suddenly felt a thud. My arrow had gone straight through the bushes and hit the van! Fortunately, he was inside the van at the time.”

Determined to master her “weapon,” she asked for help from a fellow cast member, Mark Ryan (Nasir). Trott was, he says, “So beautiful [a person]. She’s one of the gentlest, kindest, nicest people and we *all* had a very protective thing about her—she’s very gutsy as well. She was one of the chaps, one of the boys.” Pressed into service as archery instructor, Ryan “gave me some lessons between the first and second series and he was very good,” says

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Trott. "Between the two series, I spent some time practicing in the backyard with targets and I improved dramatically."

Trott does, she admits, miss the series. "I appreciate it more now, because it was such an unusual job. I was lucky. I was right there and I thought it was easy getting the job. I didn't know. I was young and green enough to think it was always going to be that easy."

Having left the Royal School Of Ballet to expand her dancing into "contemporary jazz and all the funky modern as it was then called," she wound up being cast as John Hurt's girl friend in *Heaven's Gate*. She found the experience exciting. "It was totally bewildering and fascinating and wonderful! I was 17 and it was wonderful—never having had a camera on me before—so I lapped it all up!" On returning to the London Studio Centre, she added drama to her studies. It paid off, as "I got an agent and bit parts turned into larger parts." A role as Lady Sarah Armstrong Jones in the film *Charles and Diana* led to *Robin of Sherwood*. Despite her initial misgivings, she looks back on the experience with a clearly remembered delight, readily able to tick off the things she enjoyed about *Robin of Sherwood*.

"I was the only girl, which was really nice—to have eight men to be with all the time. It was all shot on location. It wasn't high-brow heavy acting; you heard a lot of



Trott's archery skills improved by *Robin of Sherwood's* second season, especially when there was no fire on her arrows.

laughter on the set." When filming the last episode with Praed before he left, she relates, "we were hiding somewhere, and we came out with high hats and doing kicks singing 'Give My Regards To Broadway,' and we were all singing that song to him. He wasn't aware at all that we were setting it up, so we got a lovely reaction," she says.

"There was a lot of escapism. Outside of the set a lot of cavorting—climbing trees, many things you could get into—acting and physical. That's extremely unusual. Three years of continued work. You got a different chance each episode to learn, to have a go at it." She leans forward in emphasis. "The fact is you *must* get better because you're doing it every day. Nowadays," she shrugs, "I spend most of my time not working and have gotten out of the habit. So, the consistency of having a long run is wonderful. It can also have its drawbacks. You can get bored."

Was she bored? Tired? Unwilling to return should the series be reborn? There is no hesitation in her answer. "I would go back. I would be stupid not to. And I would love it. I would approach it differently this time. I would have to look at the script and see how I could work through it. Would it be pre or post-Michael Praed and what period was it written in? Would I be with the men in the forest? And if it was taken as we are now, five years on, obviously I would do the part differently." ❄



Maid Marian (Trott) and Muck (Peter Llewellyn-Williams) learn of "The Betrayal" that threatens *Robin of Sherwood*.