

Wagner: Bionic Woman wasn't about violence

By John Hill on May 27, 2009 3:27 PM |

If you had bionic limbs and super strength, would you tackle the forces of evil, or sort out that stubborn mayo tin lurking in the cupboard?

As the star of the 1970s TV series *The Bionic Woman*, Lindsay Wagner was always keen to stress that great power didn't have to come with great beatings.

She shared her philosophy with fans of the show at Excel's MCM Expo on Saturday.

She said: "I would be opening a can or tearing a phone book instead of punching a bad guy out. Because I wouldn't do that sort of thing, the writers had to find ways to use the bionics without violence."

Lindsay's bionic incarnation first appeared in a two-part episode of *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Top US tennis player Jaime Sommers rekindled a relationship with Steve Austin, but had to be rebuilt with bionic legs, an arm and an ear implant allowing super hearing.

Sadly, her body rejected the implants and she later died on the operating table.

However, that wasn't the end of the *Bionic Woman*.

Lindsay said: "They killed the character off at the end of the two-parter, but the audience went crazy. A lot of letters came in to the network, and I became one of the few people that's ever been resurrected on national TV. Maybe just myself and Charlton Heston."

The *Bionic Woman* got her own show, which ran for three seasons from 1976 to 1978. Richard Anderson – who appeared with Lindsay at the expo last weekend – took the role of her boss Oscar Goldman, the character he also played in *The Six Million Dollar Man*.

He said: "Lee Majors kept saying 'I don't want to go on with this'. But with Lindsay there was a charm and lightness to the shows. She was trying to avoid excess violence in the series."

Lindsay fought for creative input on the show, and was constantly pushing for less violence and more thought.

She said: "I didn't want the show to be a classic action show where I'm good and they're bad and it's all black and white. We were influencing an entire generation and I wanted to see more understanding of problem solving, conflict resolution and a higher consciousness.

"It was the Cold War at the time and so the bad guys were always the Russians. But the so-called bad guys were doing things for their country just like we were. I was always encouraging the writers to write about the human conflict and put a layer of bionics on top.

"I wanted to see stories about human potential. We had the room to talk about things that you wouldn't be able to do in a serious drama. We had stories about mind over matter which were completely cutting edge and we could get away with it because it was sci-fi."

Considering the importance she places on limiting violence, she can hardly have been very impressed with the 2007 TV remake starring former EastEnders actress Michelle Ryan, a show the New York Times claimed was "more about fembot martial arts and slick "Matrix"-ish special effects than about character development".

She said: "I saw it. It was a totally different show. It had nothing to do with anything we tried to do except the title and the fact she had strength."

Co-star Richard added: "They underestimated the average person.

"When you learn a lot about people, you find they know a great deal more. They were using the name to start again and it was a dark, dark story."

Lindsay has now turned her attentions to spirituality and meditation and runs holistic workshops and retreats.

She said: "I've done a meditation CD. You put it on, close your eyes and let me take you into a deep relaxing state so your immune system works better and the world looks better when you emerge.

"I've been studying meditation and spiritual healing since I was in my late teens and early 20s.

"When I was a kid I wanted to be a psychologist, not an actress. But I was dyslexic and it was too hard. I never got through the college system.

"I found I could communicate through story instead. While I was acting, I continued studying at my own pace."

So how does she feel about re-living her role in conventions around the world, more than three decades after stepping into Jaime Sommers' bionic shoes?

She said: "It's been like a third leg. It's been part of my life for most of my life.

"I'm not complaining at all. I know other people have a hard time when they get identified as something but I'm honestly happy to have the opportunity to bring joy and perhaps some knowledge into people's lives."