



Actor Barry Morse is pictured in this undated handout photo.
(THE CANADIAN PRESS/ho)

'Fugitive' detective Morse dies at age 89

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CTV

TORONTO -- British-Canadian actor-director Barry Morse, best known as the police detective in hot pursuit of David Janssen's Dr. Richard Kimble in the TV series "The Fugitive," has died in England at the age of 89.

Morse died at University College hospital in London on Saturday, his son, actor Hayward Morse, told The Canadian Press in an interview from Great Britain Monday. He said his father was taken there last Wednesday after he began experiencing blackouts and was falling down.

"He was in hospital for three days before he died. So in the long term, he was in his own home up until three days before he died, which I think is pretty good," said Hayward Morse.

"He was 89 years old and that's a good long life. He'd accomplished a lot of things," he said.

Morse had been living in London for a number of years, but had travelled to Canada and the United States to work, where his list of credits was impressive. The versatile actor, who had played everyone from "Macbeth" to Hollywood gangsters, had worked until a few years ago, but was still active in the (George Bernard) Shaw Society of England, which he was president of, and chaired society meetings as recently last week.

Morse established himself in London theatrical circles before emigrating to Canada with his wife and two children in 1951 and the family obtained Canadian citizenship. Hayward Morse said his late mother, actress Sydney Sturgess, had strong ties to Canada and persuaded Barry Morse to make the move.

Morse's career spanned seven decades and his website estimates he played more than 3,000 roles on radio, television, stage and in film. It was a long way from the two-dollars-a-week messenger boy that he started out as a young teen -- and Bethnal Green, a slum district of London where he was born 100 per cent Cockney.

His son said his father didn't really have a preference between film or stage or television.

Morse, who was the youngest candidate to be accepted into the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, appeared on Broadway in "Hide and Seek," "Salad Days" and the lead of Frederick William Rolfe in "Hadrian VII" among his numerous stage credits. He was also briefly an artistic director at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont. in 1966.

Morse joined the CBC in the early 1950s and worked for the public broadcaster in Montreal and Toronto. He soon developed a reputation as being the busiest man in television. He wrote, narrated and produced his half-hour CBC Radio series, "A Touch of Greasepaint," which ran for 14 years. He also appeared in "Barry Morse Presents" on television.

"He was instrumental in the very very beginnings of the CBC on television, and just really the beginnings of Canadian television, he was there," said Robert E. Wood, an artist who co-authored Morse's autobiography "Remember With Advantages -- Chasing 'The Fugitive' and Other Stories from an Actor's Life."

"There was a time when he was filming so many things for the CBC and Canadian television in general that he was referred to by a couple of TV critics as CBC's test pattern, that they would just throw him on when they had nothing else to air," said Wood from his home in Calgary.

Looking back on his early days in Canada, Barry Morse once said in an interview "There was a sense of adventure...a willingness to experiment and try anything."

Morse was also the first actor at the CBC to demand and get pay that was higher than the minimum scale.

In 1963, Morse was hired by producer Quinn Martin to play Lieut. Philip Gerard on "The Fugitive" -- a series that ran four seasons and 120 episodes.

"He was very proud of that. He always said he felt it was one of the best things television had produced," said Hayward Morse. "He felt it was well directed, well produced, well filmed... and that it was a very high quality standard of television. And he was very proud of his part in that television series."

Barry Morse said in a 1966 interview "On the whole, I suppose the old 'Fugitive' has been a good thing... even though I sometimes think rather ruefully that I'm doing more running than Richard Kimble."

He appeared in about one of every three episodes, which allowed him to work on other projects, but he admitted at the time the commute between Hollywood and Toronto was a "bit of a bore" especially when he met people "who really seem to believe that one is a real cop hounding that nice Dr. Kimble."

Other television roles included several miniseries such as "The Martian Chronicles," "The Winds of War," "Master of the Game," "War and Remembrance" and "Anne of Green Gables: The Continuing Story." His website said he was a five-time winner of Canada's Best Television Actor award. He was also a founding member of Theatre Compact, a troupe of Canadian stars who performed in Toronto from 1976-78.

His last theatrical movie, said Wood, was 1999's "Promise Her Anything," starring Billy Zane, although the film was shot under the title "Taxman." Wood said Morse plays Zane's great-great--great-grandfather who appears to him as a ghost in the film, which was recently released on DVD.

"I'm very saddened. He was just a remarkable man, hugely generous," said Rachel Neville-Fox, who represented Morse in Canada. "He had the most amazing energy. He would bound into the office."

Sturgess, died of Parkinson's disease in 1999 and their daughter Melanie Morse MacQuarrie, who was an actress and teacher, died in 2005.

"I think what I treasure most about him and what stays with me was his devotion to my mother," said Hayward Morse. After Sturgess died, the actor was active in the promotion of the awareness about Parkinson's disease to honour his wife.

Hayward Morse said no funeral arrangements are being made because his father wanted his body donated to science.

"My father was very concerned that what was left of him, his body, should be used for science or any kind of transplant or donations that might be useful," his son said, adding that he was trying to arrange that.

But he said there will be a celebration of his father's life in mid-summer around his birthday, which was June.

"I will try and organize an official celebration of his life to which everyone will be invited to come and raise a glass or send up a prayer or sing a song or tell a story," he said.

Morse is survived by his son, two granddaughters and two grandsons and several great-grandchildren.