

BARRY MORSE, 89: THESPIAN

## He found television stardom as the nemesis of The Fugitive

**British-trained Canadian actor portrayed the policeman who hunted down Dr. Richard Kimble in the hit 1960s series. All told, he played 3,000 characters in a career that spanned 70 years**

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TORONTO -- Canadian actor Barry Morse appeared in hundreds of movies, plays and television shows throughout his career, but was best known from Toronto to Tokyo for his role in *The Fugitive*.

The part required him to play an implacable policeman whose job it was to catch an innocent man accused of murder. The show proved to be an unprecedented ratings success, partly because David Janssen, the sad-faced actor who played the title character, generated enormous viewer sympathy.

"I got more hate mail than anyone since Adolf Hitler," said Mr. Morse.

The show ran from 1963 until 1967 and put him squarely on the map as an actor.

His career eventually spanned seven decades and his website estimates he played more than 3,000 roles between radio, television, stage and film.

It was a long way from his beginnings as a \$2-a-week messenger boy in London. Raised in Bethnal Green, at the time a Cockney slum district, he had always longed to go on the stage and became the youngest candidate to be accepted into the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He eventually appeared on Broadway in *Hide and Seek*, *Salad Days* and the lead of Frederick William Rolfe in *Hadrian VII*, among his numerous stage credits.

Along the way, he also performed in a lot of early live television shows in London.

"I did a great number of television shows for the BBC, not because I was a particularly gifted young actor, but because I was available and willing," he told *The Globe and Mail* in 1983.

He said the work was exciting, the pace frantic and the results unexpected. "The hardware was so unreliable you'd start a show with two cameras and before you had been on the air for 10 minutes they would both be broken down ... Audiences would be asked to wait for three quarters of an hour for the 'mechanical interruption,' while they dragged the camera into a corner and bashed it with spanners to try to make it better."

In 1951, after establishing himself in London theatrical circles, he emigrated to Canada with his wife and two children. His son, Hayward Morse, said his late mother, actress Sydney Sturgess, had strong ties to Canada and persuaded Barry Morse to make the move. The family later obtained Canadian citizenship.

Mr. 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 Canadian TV. 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*.

"He was instrumental in the very beginnings of the CBC on television, and just really the beginnings of Canadian television, he was there," said Robert Wood, an artist who was the co-author of the Morse 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," Mr. Wood said from his home in Calgary.

As a result, Mr. Morse was the first actor at the CBC to demand and get pay that was higher than the minimum scale. Looking back on his early days in Canada, he once said in an interview: "There was a sense of adventure ... a willingness to experiment and try anything."

In 1963, he was hired by Hollywood producer Quinn Martin to play police lieutenant Philip Gerard on *The Fugitive*, a series that ran four seasons and 120 episodes and was updated by a 1993 movie adaptation starring Harrison Ford.

"He was very proud of that. He always said he felt it was one of the best things television had produced," his son said. "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."

In a 1966 interview, Mr. Morse himself said: "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."

Employing compelling scripts, high production values, evocative music and superior performances by Mr. Morse and Mr. Janssen, plus a raft of guest stars, the show was one

of the first quality series turned out by Hollywood. Mr. Morse appeared in roughly one of every three episodes, which allowed him to work on other projects, but he admitted at the time that 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."

For his pains, Mr. Morse suddenly had to embrace the phenomenon of celebrity. "My kind of celebrity is of just the right size; pleasant but not intrusive," he once said, and for the most part he enjoyed being recognized.

"It's nice to have a friendly greeting on the street wherever I go," he told *The Globe* in 1981. "It is a form of affection, but it mustn't be overrated. You have a human duty to give as good an example as you can. The price you pay is not letting it go to your head."

In truth, he said it didn't really trouble him to be accosted in the street by people who as often as not yelled: "You dumb cop, don't you realize he's innocent?"

Mr. Morse said he experienced what he described as three different cycles of celebrity, and he felt it necessary to keep the experience in proper perspective. "You must realize how valueless, how worthless, celebrity is. The only celebrity, the only form of immortality that I know of, is through your genitals. That's the only kind I care about."

In 1966, he briefly served as artistic director at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont..

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 to 1978.

Over the years, Mr. Morse was seen on stage across the country. In December, 1980, he happily played Scrooge in a Theatre New Brunswick production of *A Christmas Carol*. At the time, he said that he felt artists had an obligation to perform in regional theatres, away from the bright lights of Broadway. "It's just as easy to do something of value in Upper Rubber Boot, Alta., as it is on Broadway," he said. "If you saw as much rubbish on Broadway as I do, you'd know that is true."

The role also gave him a chance to play opposite his wife, Sydney.

He once even attempted to start a Shakespearean company in Victoria, and hoped to build a reproduction of the original Globe theatre of 1599, and then surround it with an Elizabethan village. Mr. Morse said he would be artistic director, "to keep the tail from wagging the dog and to make sure that good theatre remains the priority." While the project enjoyed widespread support, it failed to get off the ground.

In 1987, still full of ideas, Mr. Morse launched what he described as the most extensive theatrical tour of Canada, a one-man show he "donated" to raise funds for the Performing Arts Lodges of Canada, which provides residential facilities for senior or disadvantaged people who made their careers on the stage or before the camera. He started off with performances scheduled in 120 locations and fulfilled about half of them over a period of two years.

"He had the most amazing energy," said Rachel Neville-Fox, who represented Mr. Morse in Canada. "He would bound into the office."

His last theatrical movie was *Promise Her Anything*, a 1999 film starring Billy Zane, although the film was shot under the title *Taxman*. In 2005, he made his final TV appearance when he played Josef Cherkassov in *Icon*, a thriller starring Patrick Swayze that was based on a novel by Frederick Forsyth.

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

Mr. Morse, who spent the last years of his life in London, worked until a few years ago and was active in the (George Bernard) Shaw Society of England. He served as president and chaired meetings as recently as last week.

"I always said to myself, 'I'm not going to turn into one of those old bores who's got nothing in his head but a lot of old newspaper clippings,' " he told a reporter in 1983. "The most stimulating thing about any performer is not what he did last year, but what he's going to do next year."

## BARRY MORSE

Barry Morse was born in London on July 10, 1918. He died at University College Hospital in London on Saturday. He had been admitted three days earlier after he began experiencing blackouts. He is survived by his son, Hayward, and by four grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife, Sydney Sturgess, in 1999, and by their daughter, Melanie Morse MacQuarrie, in 2005.