

Film News: Adam West, the 1960s TV Batman, Dies at 88

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 10, 2017 - 12:48pm

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LOS ANGELES – When Adam West had a voice role on “The Simpsons,” portraying the Batman – as he had in the iconic TV series from 1966 through 1968 – he remarked, in reference to the rubber muscle costume that the movie actors wore, that his Batman was “All Pure West.” West died on June 9th, 2017, at the age of 88.

His career had three acts – first as a movie/TV contract performer, then as the title character on “Batman” in 1966, and then, after a struggle to go beyond that hero role, as a notable voice actor... most famous as Mayor Adam West on the animated series “Family Guy.” For years, as he was struggling with the inability to get jobs because of his brilliantly weird and cartoonish portrayal of The Dark Knight, he tried to shake the character. But as his career blossomed again, and The Batman took off in movies, he re-engaged with his superhero self, and is acknowledged as one of the greatest portrayals of the Caped Crusader.

He was born William West Anderson in Walla Walla, Washington. After graduating Whitman College in the same town, he was drafted into the post-WWII army, where he worked as an announcer on Armed Forces Network TV. He made his film debut in a “B Movie” while living in Hawaii, a Boris Karloff film called “Voodoo Island” (1957). Bitten by the bug, he moved to Hollywood in 1959, and made his major film debut (as newly named Adam West) in the Paul Newman film, “The Young Philadelphians.”



In 2016: Burt Ward and Adam West Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of 'Batman' in Chicago

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

The next seven years had West trying to find a niche, as he switched from films (the cultish “Robinson Crusoe on Mars” in 1964) to guest spots on the TV shows of the era (including a regular bit in “The Detectives starring Robert Taylor” in 1961-62). The break came in 1966, when he was cast in the lead role on the TV show “Batman” (the comic book character at the time was on a bit of a decline). It was a pop culture sensation, with its two-day-a-week cliffhanger format, the old movie stars portraying villains, and visual/comedic tongue-in-cheek action. West himself once said, “The 1960s were defined by the three ‘B’s’... Bond, The Beatles and Batman.” [The author of this article saw the first Batman episode on the only color TV in the neighborhood. Chew on that while watching an episode on your iPhone].

Adam West’s work immediately post the Batman series (which was unceremoniously canceled after only three seasons), was spotty and difficult. He made live appearances as Batman in the 1970s, and did voiceover work on a kid’s cartoon version, but could never shake the perception of his Bat-role. A series of B-Movies followed, including “The Happy Hooker Goes to Hollywood,” but he also did guest spots on TV shows (“Fantasy Island) and some mainstream films like “Hooper” (1978) and “The New Age” (1994).

His true comeback is due to Conan O’Brien, a childhood fan who produced “Lookwell” (1991) especially for West. The pilot was intended for a TV series, but it wasn’t picked up, yet it was West’s talked-about performance that began his third act, that of a voiceover actor and torchbearer for Batman. He continued to make personal appearances with his Robin, actor Burt Ward, as the comic book culture became THE main show business culture, and the conventions flourished. He made his last live action appearance (naturally) on “The Big Bang Theory” in 2016, and did two more animated Batman voiceovers in “Batman: The Return of the Caped Crusaders” (2016) and “Batman vs. Two-Face” (2017, yet to be released).

Adam West was married three times, and is survived by Marcelle Lear, six children, five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He died in Los Angeles due to complications after a short battle with Leukemia.

West fully came to terms with his life and biggest role... “I can’t tell you how grateful I am to those fans. They are not stupid. I think they appreciate my sincerity and my work. Actors want to be loved, and Batman has done that for me. I have an audience out there which is always waiting to see whatever I do, and new generations are constantly discovering me in reruns. So, as long as I stay sharp, good things can still happen for me. Meanwhile, I keep hoping that a wonderful opportunity will come along. Believe me, my life ain’t so bad, after all.”

Source material for this article is from *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Wikipedia* and *IMDB*. Adam West, forever *The Batman*, 1928-2017



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Source URL (retrieved on *Apr 19 2024 - 10:40am*):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/27613/film-news-adam-west-who-portrayed-1960s-tv-batman-dies-at-88>

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