Film News: Martin Landau, Oscar Winner for ‘Ed Wood,’ Dies at 89

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on July 17, 2017 - 7:53am

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LOS ANGELES – His acting career spanned from working with Alfred Hitchcock to Tim Burton. Along the way, he had significant TV and film roles including a Best Supporting Oscar win for portraying Bela Lugosi in Burton’s “Ed Wood”. Martin Landau died in Los Angeles on July 15, 2017. He was 89.

He was one of the rare actors known both for distinctive parts in both television and film, and had a revival in his career towards the end of his life. Besides working for directors Hitchcock and Burton, he also has roles in films by Woody Allen, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Francis Ford Coppola and Frank Darabont. On television, he had an early role on “Mission: Impossible in the 1960s, and another on the cult series “Space :1999”



Martin Landau in a 2013 Appearance in Chicago
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Martin Landau was born in Brooklyn, New York, and had early ambitions to be a cartoonist, working from age 17 to 22 at the New York Daily News helping to produce the comic strip “The Gumps” (with main artist Gus Edson). But the acting bug bit, and Landau auditioned at New York’s famed Actors Studio, gaining a spot in the school – with Steve McQueen and James Dean – over 500 applicants. He would later become Executive Director of the Studio, along with director Sydney Pollack.

Landau made his Broadway debut in “Middle of the NIght” in 1957, and followed his film debut in “Pork Chop Hill” (1959) with a plum role as James Mason’s right-hand man in Alfred Hitchcock’s classic “North by Northwest.” In the early 1960s, he was a character actor in the infamous “Cleopatra” (1963), “The Greatest Story Every Told” and “Nevada Smith” (both 1965). But he would gain recognition on television in that decade, portraying master of disguise Rollin Hand in “Mission: Impossible.” His co-star in that series was his then wife Barbara Bain.

Television would be his calling card again in the 1970s, when he portrayed Commander John Koenig on the cult TV show “Space: 1999.” (1975-77) and he would continue doing character roles on TV, including “The Harlem Globetrotters on Gilligan’s Island” (1981) and “Murder She Wrote” (1984). He had become an acting teacher of note when Francis Ford Coppola cast him as Abe Karatz in “Tucker: The Man and His Dream” (1988). He was nominated for an Academy Award and won a Golden Globe for the role, and started an unprecedented late career renaissance.



Landau as Bela Lugosi in Director Tim Burton’s “Ed Wood”
Photo credit: Touchstone Home Entertainment

His next role was for director Woody Allen in “Crimes and Misdemeanors” in 1989, which garnered a second Academy Award nomination in a row. Allen remarked that Landau absolutely nailed the role because “[he] came from my neighborhood in Brooklyn, right near where I lived, only a few blocks away.” This was followed by Landau’s most memorable film character, portraying aging actor Bela Lugosi in Tim Burton’s biography of “Ed Wood.” He won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for the part.

He was a well-known commodity from then on, and finished his career with diverse portrayals in “Sleepy Hollow” (1999), “The Majestic” (2001), “Entourage” (2015) and “The Last Poker Game” (2017), which made its debut at the 2017 Tribeca Film Fesitval. He died of complications after a heart attack in Los Angeles, and is survived by his ex-wife Barbara Bain and their two daughters.

In a 2013 interview with Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, Martin Landau expressed this about acting, “Accessing that hidden side is what good acting is all about. And there are only a handful of people in the entire United States who interest me as actors, who surprise me… The talented actor needs craft. In a film you’re going to wind up doing a scene 15 to 20 times, just by the nature of the process. If I tell you a joke once, it’s funny. The more times I tell, the less funny it is. How do you get to the point where you can laugh again?”

Source material for this article is from Wikipedia and IMDB. Martin Landau, 1928-2017. For the complete 2013 HollywoodChicago.com interview with Martin Landau, click here. *[23]*

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