

Benedict Cumberbatch, (born July 19, 1976, London, England), acclaimed British motion-picture, theatre, and television actor known for his portrayals of intelligent, often upper-crust characters, for his deep resonant voice, and for his distinctive name. He gained widespread popularity playing a modern Sherlock Holmes in the television series *Sherlock* (2010– ) and subsequently garnered a succession of substantial roles in mainstream features. Cumberbatch was the son of two actors, Timothy Carlton (né Cumberbatch) and Wanda Ventham. He was educated at Brambletye school, in West Sussex, and Harrow School. As a student, he took part in school plays, taking roles in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (in which he played Titania, the queen of the fairies) and *As You Like It*. He took a year off between school and university, during which he taught English to Tibetan Buddhist monks in India. After his return to Great Britain, he studied drama at the University of Manchester and earned a master's degree in classical acting from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

At the start of his career, he used his father's stage name, Carlton, but, encouraged by a colleague, he began to appear under the family's original, unusual surname in order to attract greater professional attention. Cumberbatch's first work in the professional theatre was primarily Shakespearean, beginning with two repertory seasons with the New Shakespeare Company in London's Regent Park in 2001 and 2002. Over the next few years, he continued performing in London theatres, often in classics such as Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (2005; nominated for a Laurence Olivier Award for best supporting actor) and Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (2007). He became a familiar face on television as well, playing supporting roles in series such as *Tipping the Velvet* and *Silent Witness* (both 2002), *Fortysomething* (2003), and *To the Ends of the Earth* (2005). In 2005 he was nominated for a BAFTA TV Award for best actor for his portrayal of physicist Stephen Hawking in the BBC television biopic *Hawking* (2004). Cumberbatch's first major film role was in *Amazing Grace* (2006), a historical treatment of politician William Wilberforce's antislavery efforts, in which Cumberbatch played Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger.

In 2010 he broke through to far greater popularity at home and abroad as Sherlock Holmes in the BBC television series *Sherlock*, based on the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The adaptation placed the characters of the classic Victorian-era tales in 21st-century London and captured viewers' imaginations with its contemporary Holmes, who used nicotine patches (a nod to Conan Doyle's pipe-smoking Holmes) and was a self-described "high-functioning sociopath." Cumberbatch remained in the public eye with subsequent seasons of *Sherlock*, and in 2014 his performance in an episode of its third season won him an Emmy Award for outstanding actor in a miniseries or movie.

Cumberbatch starred in the 2011 Royal National Theatre adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which he alternated with actor Jonny Lee Miller in the roles of Victor Frankenstein and his creature. He earned rave reviews for his work and won several major theatrical awards, including the 2012 Olivier Award in Britain. He rounded out 2011 with roles in two high-profile films, Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* and a big-screen adaptation of author John le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.

Cumberbatch achieved a new level of fame as the villain Khan in the Hollywood blockbuster *Star Trek into Darkness* (2013). That same year he played WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in *The Fifth Estate*; a well-intentioned slave owner in *12 Years a Slave*, an adaptation of Solomon Northup's narrative (1853) of his life in captivity; and a hapless young man in *August: Osage County*, based on the play by Tracy Letts. He also lent his posh growl to the computer-animated dragon Smaug in *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (2013), the second installment in director Peter Jackson's film trilogy of J.R.R. Tolkien's novel.

In 2014 Cumberbatch starred as mathematician and logician Alan Turing in *The Imitation Game*, a drama that also featured Keira Knightley. For his performance, Cumberbatch received an Academy Award nomination for best actor. Also in 2014 he voiced an animated wolf in the comedy *Penguins of Madagascar* and reprised his role as Smaug in *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*. Cumberbatch returned to the stage as the titular Danish prince in a 2015 production of *Hamlet*. The entire run of the show, produced at the Barbican Centre, sold out a year in advance of the play's opening. Also in 2015 he appeared in the film *Black Mass* as a state senator (and brother of gangster Whitey Bulger).

Cumberbatch then starred in *Doctor Strange* (2016), portraying a Marvel Comics superhero. He reprised the role in *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021), and *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022).

Cumberbatch returned to television in *A Child in Time* (2017), a movie adapted from Ian McEwan's novel of the same name about a father whose child goes missing, and *Patrick Melrose* (2018), a miniseries based on five novels by Edward St. Aubyn focusing on a self-destructive English gentleman as he reckons with his past. During this time Cumberbatch supplied his distinctive voice to the animated features *The Grinch* and *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle* (both 2018), playing the eponymous curmudgeon and the villainous tiger Shere Khan, respectively.

Credits from 2019 included *Brexit*, a TV movie following the 2016 campaign to withdraw Britain from the European Union; *The Current War* (completed in 2017 and released two years later), about the contest between Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse to determine which electrical system would power the United States; and the World War I drama *1917*, which was directed by Sam Mendes. Cumberbatch later portrayed a Cold War spy in *The Courier* (2020). In 2021 he appeared in a number of films, including *The Mauritanian*, which was based on the memoir of a man held at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp for 14 years, and *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain*, a biopic about a British artist who was known for his anthropomorphic drawings of cats. However, his most notable performance that year was in Jane Campion's *The Power of the Dog*, a western about a rancher whose cruelty—especially toward his brother and the latter's wife—hides inner turmoil. For his work in the film, Cumberbatch received an Oscar nomination.

Cumberbatch was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2015.