

Benedict Cumberbatch

Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch **CBE** (born 19 July 1976) is an English actor. Known for his work on screen and stage, he has received various accolades, including a British Academy Television Award, a Primetime Emmy Award and a Laurence Olivier Award. He has also been nominated for two Academy Awards, two British Academy Film Awards and four Golden Globe Awards. In 2014, *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world, and in 2015, he was appointed a CBE at Buckingham Palace for services to the performing arts and to charity.

Cumberbatch studied drama at the Victoria University of Manchester and obtained a Master of Arts in classical acting at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. He began acting in Shakespearean theatre productions before making his West End debut in Richard Eyre's revival of *Hedda Gabler* in 2005. Since then, he has starred in Royal National Theatre productions of *After the Dance* (2010) and *Frankenstein* (2011), winning the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Actor for the latter. In 2015, he played the title role in *Hamlet* at the Barbican Theatre.

Cumberbatch's television work includes his performance as Stephen Hawking in the television film *Hawking* (2004). He gained greater recognition for playing Sherlock Holmes in the BBC series *Sherlock* from 2010 to 2017, for which he won a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Miniseries or a Movie. For playing the title role in the miniseries *Patrick Melrose* (2018), he won the British Academy Television Award for Best Actor.

In films, Cumberbatch has played Khan in *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), and has appeared in the historical dramas *Amazing Grace* (2006), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *1917* (2019) and *The Courier* (2020). He received critical acclaim and nominations for the Academy Award for Best Actor for his performances as Alan Turing in *The Imitation Game* (2014) and as a volatile rancher in *The Power of the Dog* (2021). From 2012 to 2014, through voice and motion capture, Cumberbatch played Smaug and Sauron in *The Hobbit* film series. Since 2016, he has played Dr. Stephen

Benedict Cumberbatch

CBE

Cumberbatch at the 2019 San Diego Comic-Con

Born	<div>Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch</div> <div>19 July 1976</div> <div>Hammersmith, London, England</div>
Nationality	British
Alma mater	<div>University of Manchester · London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art</div>
Occupation	Actor
Years active	1998–present
Works	Full list
Spouse	Sophie Hunter (mar. 2015)
Children	3
Parents	<div>Timothy Carlton (father) Wanda Ventham (mother)</div>

Strange in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, including the films *Doctor Strange* (2016) and *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022).

Early life and education

Antecedents and family tree

In 1728,^[2] Benedict Cumberbatch's 7th-great-grandfather, Abraham Cumberbatch of Saint Andrew, Barbados (died 1753), acquired properties on the island of Barbados in the West Indies,^[3] which used enslaved people for labour. St Nicholas Abbey was owned by Cumberbatch's ancestors for at least two hundred years.^[4]

These properties were passed down through the generations to Benedict's great-great-great-grandfather, Abraham Parry Cumberbatch^{[5][6]} (died 1840 in Hellingly, Sussex). He was an absentee landlord of two estates, Cleland and Lammings, for which he received £5388 as slave compensation (via the Slave Compensation Act 1837, four years after the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 had abolished slavery).^[7] The Cleland plantation enslaved 250 people, and was the main source of the Cumberbatch family's considerable wealth at the time,^[8] they were one of the richest families in Britain.^[2]

There has been media speculation^{[8][9]} that the Barbados National Task Force on Reparations, which, as part of the wider Caribbean's CARICOM Reparations Commission, is as of January 2023^[2] seeking reparations from wealthy British MP Richard Drax for his ancestors' involvement in slavery,^[10] might also consider seeking reparations from families such as the Cumberbatches. Benedict Cumberbatch has said that by the time of his birth, most of the money had run out, and he grew up "definitely middle class",^{[2][8][9]} or upper middle class.^[11] The Drax family still owns a large estate in Barbados, and Richard Drax is said to be worth at least £150 million.^[10]

Abraham Parry Cumberbatch's son (Benedict's great-great-grandfather) Robert William Cumberbatch, was a British consul in Turkey and the Russian Empire.^{[12][13]} His great-grandfather, Henry Alfred Cumberbatch, was also a diplomat who served as consul in Turkey and Lebanon, and his grandfather, Henry Carlton Cumberbatch, was a submarine officer of both World Wars, and a prominent figure of London high society.^{[14][15]}

Cumberbatch is third cousin 16 times removed of King Richard III, whom he portrayed in *The Hollow Crown*.^{[16][17][18]} He attended Richard III's 2015 reburial and read a poem.^{[19][20]}

Birth family and schooling

Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch was born on 19 July 1976^[21] at Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital in the London district of Hammersmith,^[22] to actors Timothy Carlton (born Timothy Carlton Congdon Cumberbatch) and Wanda Ventham.^[23] He grew up in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea. He has a half-sister, Tracy Peacock, from his mother's first marriage.^[24]

Cumberbatch attended boarding schools from the age of eight,^[25] attending Brambletye, a prep school near East Grinstead, West Sussex.^[26]

Relatives	<div>Henry Carlton Cumberbatch (grandfather)</div> <div>Henry Alfred Cumberbatch (great-grandfather)</div> <div>Robert William Cumberbatch (great-great-grandfather)</div>
Awards	<div>Full list</div> <div>Cumberbatch's voice</div> <div>0:43</div> <div>from the BBC programme <i>Front Row</i>, 23 December 2010^[1]</div>

He undertook secondary schooling as an arts scholar at Harrow School.^{[27][28]} He was a member of the Rattigan Society, Harrow's principal club for the dramatic arts, which was named after Old Harrovian and playwright Sir Terence Rattigan.^[29] He was involved in numerous Shakespearean works at school and made his acting debut as Titania, Queen of the Fairies, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when he was 12.^[30] His first leading role was as Eliza Doolittle in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, in a production by the Head of Classics, James Morwood, who observed that Cumberbatch "acted everyone else off the stage".^[31] Cumberbatch's drama teacher, Martin Tyrell, called him "the best schoolboy actor" he had ever worked with.^[32] Despite his abilities, Cumberbatch's drama teacher at Harrow warned him against a career in acting, calling it a "tough business".^[33]

Tertiary education

After leaving Harrow, Cumberbatch took a gap year to volunteer as an English teacher at a Tibetan monastery in Darjeeling, India.^[34]

He then attended the Victoria University of Manchester, where he studied drama.^[35]

He continued his training as an actor at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA), graduating with an MA in classical acting.^[36] In January 2018, Cumberbatch succeeded Timothy West as president of LAMDA.^[37]

Performing arts career

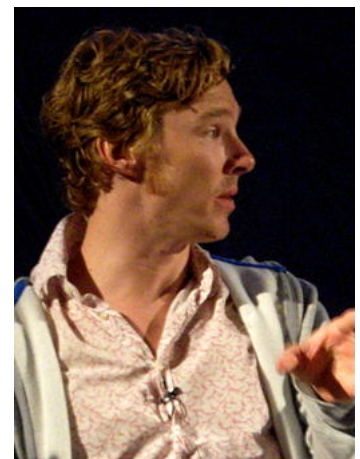
Theatre

Since 2001, Cumberbatch has had major roles in a dozen classic plays at the Regent's Park Open Air, Almeida, Royal Court and Royal National Theatres. He was nominated for an Olivier Award for Best Performance in a Supporting Role for his role as George Tesman in *Hedda Gabler*, which he performed at the Almeida Theatre on 16 March 2005 and at the Duke of York's Theatre when it transferred to the West End on 19 May 2005.^[38] This transfer marked his first West End appearance.^[39]

In June 2010, Cumberbatch led the revival of Sir Terence Rattigan's *After the Dance* directed by Thea Sharrock at the Royal National Theatre.^[40] He played 1920s aristocrat David Scott-Fowler to commercial and critical success.^[41] The play won four Olivier Awards including Best Revival.^[42] He acted in Danny Boyle's *The Children's Monologues*, a theatrical charity event at London's Old Vic Theatre on 14 November 2010 which was produced by Dramatic Need.^[43]

In February 2011, Cumberbatch began playing, on alternate nights, both Victor Frankenstein and his creature, opposite Jonny Lee Miller, in Boyle's stage production of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* at the Royal National Theatre.^{[44][45]} *Frankenstein* was broadcast to cinemas as a part of National Theatre Live in March 2011.^[46]

Cumberbatch achieved the "Triple Crown of London Theatre" in 2011 when he received the Olivier Award, Evening Standard Award and Critics' Circle Theatre Award for his performance in *Frankenstein*.^[47]



During rehearsals for *Frankenstein*, April 2011

Cumberbatch was a part of a cast featuring members of the Royal National Theatre Company in *50 Years on Stage*, the Royal National Theatre's landmark event for its 50th anniversary on 2 November 2013. He played Rosencrantz in a selected scene from Sir Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.^[48] The show was directed by Sir Nicholas Hytner and was broadcast on BBC Two and in cinemas worldwide as a part of National Theatre Live.^[49]

Cumberbatch returned to theatre to play Shakespeare's Hamlet at London's Barbican Theatre. The production was directed by Lyndsey Turner and produced by Sonia Friedman, which started its 12-week run in August 2015.^{[50][51][52]} The performance, co-starring Sian Brooke, was broadcast by the National Theatre Company by satellite internationally as *Hamlet in Rehearsal*.^{[53][54]} He earned his third Laurence Olivier Awards nomination for the role.^[55]

Television

Cumberbatch's early television roles include two separate guest roles in *Heartbeat* (2000, 2004), Freddy in *Tipping the Velvet* (2002), Edward Hand in *Cambridge Spies* (2003) and Rory in the ITV comedy drama series *Fortysomething* (2003). He also featured in *Spooks* and *Silent Witness*. In 2004, he landed his first main part in television as Stephen Hawking in *Hawking*. He was nominated for the BAFTA TV Award for Best Actor and won the Golden Nymph for Television Films – Best Performance by an Actor. He later provided Hawking's voice in the first episode of the television series *Curiosity*. He also appeared in the BBC miniseries *Dunkirk* as Lieutenant Jimmy Langley.^[56]



Filming *Sherlock* in Chinatown, London, March 2010

In 2005, Cumberbatch portrayed protagonist Edmund Talbot in the miniseries *To the Ends of the Earth*, based on Sir William Golding's trilogy; during filming he said he experienced a terrifying carjacking in South Africa, managing to escape.^[57] He made brief appearances in the comedy sketch show *Broken News* and the Channel 4 sitcom *Nathan Barley* in 2005 and featured alongside Tom Hardy in the television adaptation of *Stuart: A Life Backwards*, which aired on the BBC in September 2007.^[58]

In 2008, Cumberbatch played the lead character in the BBC miniseries drama *The Last Enemy*, earning a Satellite Award nomination for Best Actor in a Miniseries or TV Film. In 2009, he appeared in *Agatha Christie's Miss Marple: Murder Is Easy* as Luke Fitzwilliam. He played Bernard in the TV adaptation of *Small Island*, earning him a nomination for BAFTA Television Award for Best Supporting Actor.^[59] Cumberbatch featured in Michael Dobbs' play, *The Turning Point*,^[60] which aired as one of a series of TV plays broadcast live on Sky Arts. The play depicted an October 1938 meeting between Soviet spy Guy Burgess, then a young man working for the BBC, and Winston Churchill.^[61] Cumberbatch portrayed Burgess; Churchill was played by Matthew Marsh, who had played a supporting role in *Hawking*.^[62] He narrated the 6-part series *South Pacific* (US title: *Wild Pacific*), which aired from May to June 2009 on BBC 2.^[63]

In 2010, Cumberbatch portrayed Vincent van Gogh in *Van Gogh: Painted with Words*. *The Daily Telegraph* called his performance "[a] treat ... vividly bringing Van Gogh to impassioned, blue-eyed life."^[64] In the same year, Cumberbatch began playing Sherlock Holmes in the joint BBC/PBS television series *Sherlock*, to critical acclaim.^{[65][66][67]} The second series began on New Year's Day 2012 in the United Kingdom^[68] and was broadcast on PBS in the United States in May 2012.^[69] The third series aired on PBS over a period of three weeks in January to February 2014. Cumberbatch won an Emmy as Outstanding Lead Actor in a Miniseries or a Movie for the third episode of the third series of the show entitled *His Last Vow*. Cumberbatch has one of the most

aggressive fanbases to date, part of the 'Big Three' fandoms on the social media site Tumblr, called SuperWhoLock.^[70] In April 2015, Cumberbatch was nominated for his sixth British Academy Television Award for Best Leading Actor for the third series of the *Sherlock*.^{[71][72]} In 2016, he was once again nominated for an Emmy as Outstanding Lead Actor in a Miniseries or a Movie, this time for *Sherlock: The Abominable Bride*.^[73]

In 2012, he led the BBC and HBO co-produced miniseries *Parade's End* with Rebecca Hall. An adaptation of the tetralogy of novels of the same name by Ford Madox Ford, it was filmed as five episodes, directed by Susanna White and adapted by Sir Tom Stoppard.^{[74][75]} His performance earned Cumberbatch his second Emmy Award nomination for Best Actor in Miniseries or TV Movie.^[76] In February 2014, Cumberbatch appeared with *Sesame Street* characters Murray and Count von Count for PBS.^[77] In 2016, Cumberbatch portrayed Richard III in Shakespeare's play of the same name, as part of the second series of films for *The Hollow Crown*, which aired in both Britain and the United States.^[78] Cumberbatch has also been a brand ambassador for Dunlop and Jaguar luxury cars since 2014.^{[79][80]}

Cumberbatch starred in *Patrick Melrose*, a miniseries adaptation of the Edward St Aubyn novels, which began airing on Showtime on 12 May 2018.^{[81][82]} In 2019 Cumberbatch appeared as British political strategist Dominic Cummings (who served as the campaign director of Vote Leave, the official campaign in favour of the UK leaving the European Union) in HBO and Channel 4's television film *Brexit: The Uncivil War*.^[83] In 2023 he was confirmed a executive producer and lead role in the miniseries *Eric* for streaming service Netflix.^[84]

Film

In 2006, Cumberbatch played late 18th/early 19th century British parliamentarian William Pitt the Younger in *Amazing Grace*, a role that garnered him a nomination for the London Film Critics Circle "British Breakthrough Acting Award".^[85] In *Atonement* (2007), Cumberbatch played what *The Guardian* called one of his "small parts in big films", and came to the attention of Sue Vertue and Stephen Moffat, who would later cast him in *Sherlock*.^[86] In 2008 he had a supporting role in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and the next year he appeared in the Charles Darwin biographical film *Creation* as Darwin's friend Joseph Hooker. In 2010, he appeared in *The Whistleblower* as well as *Four Lions*. He portrayed Peter Guillam, George Smiley's right-hand man, in the 2011 adaptation of the John le Carré novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. The film was directed by Tomas Alfredson and featured Gary Oldman and Colin Firth.^[87] Cumberbatch played Major Jamie Stewart in Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* in 2011.^[87]

In 2012, Cumberbatch provided the voice and motion-capture for both Smaug the Dragon and the Necromancer in *An Unexpected Journey*, the first instalment of *The Hobbit* series based on the novel of the same name by J. R. R. Tolkien.^[88] He reprised his roles as Smaug and the Necromancer for *The Desolation of Smaug* (2013) and *The Battle of the Five Armies* (2014).^{[89][90]} For the motion-capture aspect of the films, he used a suit and facial markers to highlight the dragon's expressions and movements. Cumberbatch told *Total Film* "You just have to lose your shit on a carpeted floor, in a place that looks a little bit like a mundane government building. It was just me as well, with four static cameras and all the sensors."^[90]

In 2013, Cumberbatch appeared in J. J. Abrams' sequel, *Star Trek Into Darkness*, as Khan, the film's antagonist.^{[91][92]} Three of the four films he featured in during the second half of 2013 premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival: *The Fifth Estate*, in which he



Cumberbatch at the premiere of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, September 2011

played WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, *12 Years a Slave*, in which he played William Prince Ford, a slave owner, and *August: Osage County*, in which he played Charles Aiken.^[93] For the official soundtrack of the latter film, he recorded a song titled "Can't Keep it Inside".^[94]

Cumberbatch had a voice role in DreamWorks Animation's feature film *Penguins of Madagascar*, which was released in November 2014.^{[95][96]} He then starred in the historical drama *The Imitation Game* as British cryptographer Alan Turing, also released in November 2014. The role earned him nominations for the Golden Globe, BAFTA, SAG, and Academy Award for Best Actor.^{[97][98][99]} In May 2014, he joined the cast of the film *Black Mass* opposite Johnny Depp which was distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.^[100]

Cumberbatch starred as Doctor Strange in both the eponymous film released in November 2016,^[101] in *Avengers: Infinity War* in April 2018,^[102] and in *Avengers: Endgame* in April 2019. His depiction of Strange also appeared in *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021) and in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022).^[103] He starred as electricity titan Thomas Edison in the film *The Current War* in September 2017.^[104] In 2018, Cumberbatch voiced the title character in the film *The Grinch*,^[105] and provided the voice and did performance capture for the tiger Shere Khan in *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle*, Netflix's film adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, starring alongside Christian Bale and Cate Blanchett.^[106] In 2019, he appeared briefly as British Colonel Mackenzie in Sam Mendes' World War I film *1917*.^[107]



Cumberbatch in Kathmandu on the set of *Doctor Strange*, November 2015

In 2021, Cumberbatch starred in the drama *The Power of the Dog*, written and directed by Jane Campion. His performance in the film was acclaimed,^[108] and he received nominations for the Academy Award, British Academy Film Award, Screen Actors Guild Award, and Golden Globe Award for Best Actor.^{[109][110][111][112]} The same year Cumberbatch played Louis Wain, an eccentric English artist known for drawing anthropomorphized large-eyed cats, in *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain*.^[113]

Cumberbatch will star as the titular character in Wes Anderson's *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (2023), a film adaptation of a short story by Roald Dahl. He will appear opposite Ralph Fiennes, Dev Patel and Ben Kingsley.^[114]

Radio

Cumberbatch has repeatedly expressed his affection for radio and has done numerous productions for the BBC.^[115] Among his best-known radio work is the adaptation of John Mortimer's novel *Rumpole and the Penge Bungalow Murders* in 2009. He played Young Rumpole, and went on to play the part in nine more adaptations of Mortimer's works. Between 2008 and 2014, he played Captain Martin Crieff in the BBC Radio 4's sitcom *Cabin Pressure*, alongside Stephanie Cole, John Finnemore, and Roger Allam.^[116] He then went on to play the Angel Islington in the 2013 BBC Radio 4 adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. In the same year, he led the BBC Radio 3 adaptation of Michael Frayn's play *Copenhagen* wherein he played theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg.^[117]

For the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings, on 6 June 2014 Cumberbatch read the original BBC radio bulletins from June 1944 for BBC Radio 4.^[118]

Narration

Cumberbatch has narrated numerous documentaries for the National Geographic and Discovery channels. He has also read for several audiobooks, including *Casanova*, *The Tempest*, *The Making of Music*, *Death in a White Tie*, *Artists in Crime*, *Tom and Viv*, and *Sherlock Holmes: The Rediscovered Railway Mysteries and Other Stories*. He has done voice-overs for several commercials, including for major names Jaguar, Sony, Pimms, and Google+, performing the *Seven Ages of Man* monologue. For the 2012 London Olympics, he featured in a short film on the history of London, which began the BBC coverage of the opening ceremony.^[119] He made appearances for two Cheltenham Festivals, in July 2012 for Music when he read World War I poetry and prose accompanied by piano pieces^[120] and in October 2012 for Literature when he discussed *Sherlock* and *Parade's End* at The Centaur.^[121] In 2012, he lent his voice to a four-part, spoken-word track titled "Flat of Angles" for *Late Night Tales* based on a story written by author and poet Simon Cleary, the final instalment of which was released on 9 May 2014.^{[122][123]}

In 2012, he provided the voice of Dante Alighieri in the documentary *Girlfriend in a Coma*.^[124] In 2013, Cumberbatch narrated the documentary film *Jerusalem* about the ancient city. It was distributed by National Geographic Cinema Ventures in IMAX 3D theatres worldwide.^{[125][126]} The same year, he appeared as a special guest in a recording of Gordon Getty's opera *Usher House*, where he voiced the role of "the visitor", recorded and released by PENTATONE.^{[127][128]}

He narrated the documentary *Cristiano Ronaldo: The World at His Feet* about the Portuguese footballer for Vimeo and Vision Films in 2014.^[129] In August 2014, he recorded the first ever unabridged audiobook of William Golding's 1964 novel, *The Spire*, for Canongate Books.^[130]

Music

On 28 September 2016, Cumberbatch appeared on stage with Pink Floyd member David Gilmour during one of the musician's shows in London held at the Royal Albert Hall. He sang lead vocals on the song "Comfortably Numb", singing the verse sections originally sung by Roger Waters.^[131]

Impressionist

Adept at impersonating others, Cumberbatch was referred to as the "New King of Celebrity Impressionists" by Vulture magazine.^[132] He has imitated celebrities on a number of chat shows, such as *The Graham Norton Show* on the BBC, *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* on NBC, and in general interviews on channels such as MTV.^[133] His impersonations include Alan Rickman, Sean Connery, Jack Nicholson, Tom Hiddleston, Michael Caine, Christopher Walken, Tom Holland, Bane, John Malkovich, Matthew McConaughey, Taylor Swift and Chewbacca.^[132]

Production company

Cumberbatch, Adam Ackland, writer-director Patrick Monroe, action coordinator Ben Dillon, and production manager Adam Selves launched a production company, SunnyMarch Ltd., in late 2013.^[134]

Their first project under the company's banner was the £87,000 crowd-funded short film *Little Favour*, written and directed by Monroe with Cumberbatch in the lead role. The 30-minute action-thriller became internationally available on iTunes on 5 November 2013.^{[134][135]} In 2022 filming began on *The End We Start From*, an adaptation of the Megan Hunter novel of the same name, the rights to which the company had acquired in 2017.^[136]

Other activities

Charity

Cumberbatch is an ambassador for The Prince's Trust.^{[137][138]} He is a supporter and patron of organisations focused on using the arts to help disadvantaged young people including Odd Arts, Anno's Africa and Dramatic Need.^{[139][140][141]} Since portraying Stephen Hawking in 2004, he has been an ambassador, and in 2015 patron,^[142] for the Motor Neurone Disease Association and in 2014 did the Ice Bucket Challenge for the organisation.^[143] He also set up a recovery fund for the benefit of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Association.^{[144][145][146]} Cumberbatch has donated artworks for charities and fundraisers including the Willow Foundation, and Thomas Coram Foundation for Children.^{[147][148]}

Together with Prince Philip, Cumberbatch presented 85 young people with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at St James's Palace on 19 March 2014.^[149] "Our ambition is to extend this opportunity to hundreds of thousands across the UK", Cumberbatch said on behalf of the youth awards programme.^[150]

In May 2014, he joined Prince William and Ralph Lauren at Windsor Castle for a cancer awareness and fundraising gala for the benefit of the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust. Cumberbatch stated, "Cancer isn't a disease that needs much awareness, but it does need continued funding for research."^{[151][152]} In September 2014, he participated in a video campaign for Stand Up To Cancer.^[153] Cumberbatch posed for photographer Jason Bell for an exhibition at Pall Mall, London from 16 to 20 September 2014 to mark 10 years of the "Give Up Clothes For Good" charity campaign, which has raised £17 million for Cancer Research UK.^[154] In 2014, Cumberbatch publicly backed "Hacked Off" and its campaign for UK press self-regulation by "safeguarding the press from political interference while also giving vital protection to the vulnerable."^{[155][156]} In late 2014, Cumberbatch designed a Sherlock Holmes-themed Paddington Bear statue, one of fifty located around London prior to the release of the film *Paddington*, which was auctioned to raise funds for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).^[157]



Cumberbatch (sixth from left, standing) and the cast of *The Children's Monologues*, at the Old Vic Theatre in London, November 2010

In a November 2014 cover story for *Out* promoting *The Imitation Game*, Cumberbatch opened up about sexual experimentation during his time in boarding schools stating, "While there was experimentation, it had never occurred to me as, 'Oh, this is that!' It was just boys and their penises, the same way with girls and vaginas and boobs. It wasn't out of desire." LGBT group Stonewall released a statement praising Cumberbatch's comments, saying, "Seeing someone in the public eye – especially somebody as influential as Benedict – talking positively around gay issues, is powerful for young lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It is often difficult for those growing up to find role models who demonstrate that it is equally okay to be gay or straight."^{[158][159]}

Cumberbatch is a founding member of the "Save Soho" campaign which aims "to protect and nurture iconic music and performing arts venues in Soho."^[160] In an open letter published in *The Guardian* on 31 January 2015, Cumberbatch, amongst others, asked for pardons of all gay and bisexual men who were convicted under the same now-defunct "indecent" laws as Alan Turing was (whom Cumberbatch portrayed in *The Imitation Game*).^{[161][162]}

In September 2015, Cumberbatch condemned the UK government's response to the migrant crisis in a speech to theatregoers during a curtain call at a performance of *Hamlet*, for which he stars. He also fronted a video campaign to help the charity *Save The Children* in its mission to aid young Syrian refugees. He was one of the signatories of an open letter, published in *The Guardian*, criticising the government for its actions regarding the refugee problem.^[163] He also gave nightly speeches after his curtain call as *Hamlet* at the Barbican in London, asking for donations to help Syrian refugees. At the end of the run, the audience contributed more than £150,000 for *Save the Children*.^[164] He faced criticism for not taking in refugees himself, responding "I do have a house, but it's empty, it's gutted, there's no electricity or water, so that wouldn't work, and I have a baby in my flat, there are no spare rooms".^[165] In 2017 he told *The Big Issue* "I understand why some might think I should be housing people instead of complaining about a government not doing it. But I was trying to raise awareness that we can do more as a society [...] But we raised money for children in need. So I don't regret doing it for a second, and I will do it again, even if it does put me in the firing line".^[166]

In May 2020, Cumberbatch was among the ten celebrities who read an instalment of *Roald Dahl's* children's fantasy novel *James and the Giant Peach*. The audio-visual readings were published by Oscar-winning director *Taika Waititi* in aid of the global-non profit charity *Partners In Health*, co-founded by Dahl's daughter *Ophelia*, which had been fighting *COVID-19* in vulnerable areas.^[167]

Politics

In 2003, Cumberbatch joined the *Stop the War Coalition* protest in London against the *Iraq War*.^[168] He addressed activists in a 2010 protest sponsored by the *Trade Union Congress* in *Westminster* on the suggested risks to the arts due to spending cuts expected in the *Spending Review*.^{[169][170]} In 2013, he protested against what he perceived were civil liberties violations by the UK government.^{[171][172]}

Cumberbatch is a supporter of LGBT+ rights and in July 2013 officiated at the same-sex marriage of friends. Through this ordination he officiated the wedding of *Robert Rinder*, best known as Judge Rinder and his partner Seth Cummings.^{[173][174]} For *International Women's Day* 2014, he was a signatory of *Amnesty International's* letter to the Prime Minister *David Cameron* for women's rights in Afghanistan.^[175] Cumberbatch identifies as a *feminist*.^[176]

In 2016, Cumberbatch was one of over 280 figures from the arts world who backed a vote for the United Kingdom to stay in the *European Union* with regard to the *June 2016 referendum* on that issue.^[177]

Awards and honours

Cumberbatch was appointed a *CBE* in the *2015 Birthday Honours* for services to the performing arts and to charity.^[178] He received the honour from the Queen at an investiture ceremony at *Buckingham Palace* on 10 November 2015.^[179]

In February 2016, Cumberbatch was appointed visiting fellow at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University.^[180]

Public image and other recognition

Cumberbatch achieved international recognition with the first series of *Sherlock* in 2010.^{[181][182][183]} He has since been called "The Thinking Woman's Crumpet" and has been a mainstay in numerous "Sexiest Man Alive" lists including those of *Empire* and *People*.^{[184][185][186][187]}

Tatler listed Cumberbatch in the "Most Eligible Bachelors in the United Kingdom" in 2012.^[188] In the same year, Cumberbatch described a cyberstalking incident in which he discovered that someone had been live-tweeting his movements in his London home.^[189] Coming to terms with it, he said, it is "an ongoing process. To think that somebody knew everything I'd done in a day and told the rest of the world in real time!"^[190] His photograph taken at the Garrick Club by Derry Moore, 12th Earl of Drogheda was the cover of Moore's 2012 book *An English Room*.^[191]

In 2013, Cumberbatch was ranked fifth in the *Tatler's* "Most Fascinating People in Britain" list, higher than the Duchess of Cambridge and just below Queen Elizabeth II.^[192] *Entertainment Weekly* identified Cumberbatch as one of the "50 Coolest and Most Creative Entertainers" in Hollywood.^[193] He has also appeared on the covers of *GQ*, *Time* and *The Hollywood Reporter's* "New A-list" issue.^[194]



Waxwork of Cumberbatch at Madame Tussauds, London

In 2014, Cumberbatch was included in *The Sunday Times* "100 Makers of the 21st Century", cited as this generation's Laurence Olivier.^{[195][196]} Film critic Roger Friedman stated that "Cumberbatch may be the closest thing to a real descendant of Sir Laurence Olivier."^[197] *GQ* identified him as one of the "100 Most Connected Men" in the UK in 2014.^[198] In the same year, *Country Life* magazine labelled him as one of its "Gentlemen of the Year".^[199]

In April 2014, Cumberbatch was regarded as a British cultural icon, with young adults from abroad naming him among a group of people whom they most associated with UK culture, which included William Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth II, David Beckham, J. K. Rowling, The Beatles, Charlie Chaplin, Elton John and Adele.^{[200][201]} The same month, *Time* magazine included him in its annual *Time* 100 as one of the Most Influential People in the World.^[202] Cumberbatch was the inspiration and focus of the play *Benedict Cumberbatch Must Die* which, despite its title, was a "love letter" and portrait of the fan obsession surrounding the actor. It premiered in June 2014 at BATS Theatre in New Zealand.^[203] The Tennessee Aquarium named one of its otters "Benny" in reference to Cumberbatch's first name after a naming contest on the zoo's website.^[204]

A wax figure of Cumberbatch has been on display at Madame Tussauds London since October 2014.^[205] In 2015, he was named one of *GQ's* 50 best dressed British men.^[206] In 2018, PETA declared Cumberbatch and director Ava DuVernay to be the Most Beautiful Vegan Celebs of 2018.^[207]

Personal life

While in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in 2005, Cumberbatch and two friends (Theo and Denise Black)^[137] were abducted, after bursting a tyre, and held at gunpoint by a group of locals. Eventually their abductors drove them into unsettled territory and set them free without explanation. Cumberbatch said of the incident: "It taught me that you come into this world as you leave it, on your own. It's made me want to live a life less ordinary."^{[208][209][210]} Before the burst tyre, they had been listening to "How to Disappear Completely" by Radiohead. Following this experience, whenever Cumberbatch hears the song it "reminds [him] of a sense of reality ... [and] a reason for hope".^[137]



Cumberbatch with his wife Sophie Hunter, July 2015

He subscribes to Buddhist philosophy and has expressed affinity for meditation and mindfulness.^{[190][211]}

Cumberbatch was in a twelve-year-long relationship with actress Olivia Poulet, from his time at Manchester University until 2010.^{[212][213]}

Cumberbatch is married to English theatre and opera director Sophie Hunter. Their engagement was announced in the "Forthcoming Marriages" section of The Times on 5 November 2014, after a seventeen-year friendship.^{[214][215]} On 14 February 2015, the couple married at the 12th-century Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Mottistone on the Isle of Wight followed by a reception at Mottistone Manor.^[216] They have three sons.^{[217][218][219][220]}

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"When I heard about the gap year of teaching English at a Tibetan monastery, I knew I had to do something about it really quickly otherwise it was going to get allocated ... I worked for six months to drum up the finance as it was voluntary – there was no income. I worked in Penhaligon's the perfumery for almost five months and I did waiting jobs ... The monastery was a fantastic experience; you lived your life by very limited means, although you were given board and lodgings."
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- Benedict Cumberbatch (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1212722/>) at IMDb
- Benedict Cumberbatch interview (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/magazine/culture/benedict-cumberbatch-interview-patrick-melrose-tv-drama-edward-st-aubyn-vbgnnmkfb>): the Sherlock star on playing Patrick Melrose in Edward St Aubyn's masterpiece, *The Sunday Times*

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