

WILLIAM CONRAD BIO

William Conrad was an American film and television director and an actor and narrator in radio, film, and television known for his baritone voice, as well as his sizable girth.

Conrad was born William Cann in Louisville, Kentucky. Starting work in radio in the late 1930s in California, Conrad went on to serve as a fighter pilot in World War II. He returned to the airwaves after the war, going on to accumulate over 7,000 roles in radio by his own estimate.

Conrad's deep, resonant voice led to a number of noteworthy roles in radio drama, most prominently his originating the role of Marshal Matt Dillon on the Western program Gunsmoke from 1952-61. He was considered for the role when the series was brought to television in 1955, but his increasing obesity led to the casting of James Arness instead. Other series to which Conrad contributed his talents included Escape, Suspense and The Damon Runyon Theater. One particularly memorable radio piece was the 1957 CBS Radio Workshop broadcast "Epitaphs," an adaptation of the Edgar Lee Masters poetry volume Spoon River Anthology; Conrad both directed and narrated the production.

Among Conrad's various film roles, where he was usually cast as threatening figures, perhaps his most notable role was his first credited one, as one of the gunmen sent to eliminate Burt Lancaster in the 1946 film The Killers. He also appeared in Body and Soul (1947), Sorry, Wrong Number, Joan of Arc (both 1948), and The Naked Jungle (1954).

He moved to television in the 1960s; his first decade in the medium was largely marked by a return to voice work (most notably as narrator of The Fugitive from 1963-67) and the direction of Brainstorm in 1965; he narrated the animated Bullwinkle series from 1959-64 (as "Bill Conrad"), and later performed the role of Denethor in the 1980 animated TV version of J. R. R. Tolkien's The Return of the King. But the 1970s saw him starring onscreen in the first of three detective series which would bring him an added measure of renown, Cannon, which ran from 1971-76. He later narrated Buck Rogers in the 25th Century (1979) and starred in both Nero Wolfe (1981) and Jake and the Fatman (1987-92).

Conrad's credits as a director include episodes of The Rifleman, Bat Masterson, Route 66, Have Gun, Will Travel, and 77 Sunset Strip, among others, and feature films such as Two on a Guillotine.

On February 11, 1994, Conrad died from congestive heart failure in Los Angeles, California. He is interred at Forest Lawn, Hollywood Hills Cemetery in the Lincoln Terrace, Plot Number 4448.

Materials excerpted from Wikipedia - the online encyclopedia.