

In Remembrance: Les Tremayne      1913 - 2003

Les Tremayne, one of the best-known actors on radio in the 1930s and '40s and star of the sci-fi classic *War of the Worlds* died December 19, 2003 at age 90.

Born in Balham, England, Tremayne moved to Chicago with his family at age 4. He learned to hide his British accent after a group of bullies beat him. In 1927 Tremayne's father forced him to quit high school and go to work. His mother encouraged him to become an actor, and he worked in community theater and other odd jobs before landing his first radio job in 1930.

He would appear on numerous radio shows, including "Grand Hotel," often without benefit of rehearsal. Tremayne received his big break in 1936 replacing Don Ameche as the leading man on "The First Nighter," a weekly program of original half-hour radio dramas broadcast before a live audience in Chicago. Tremayne, who was the original leading man on "The Romance of Helen Trent", left Chicago in 1943 for Los Angeles and later New York.

In Los Angeles he co-starred on the "Old Gong Show" and when the show moved to New York, where he co-starred with a relatively unknown comic Jackie Gleason. New York proved to be very productive for Tremayne's career, starring in "The Thin Man" and "The Falcon" radio series. He also appeared for 18 months in "Detective Story" on Broadway.

A poll in the early 1940s cited Tremayne as one of the three most famous voices in America. The other two were President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Bing Crosby.

Tremayne appeared in a number of sci-fi and horror films during the 1950s and 60s. He played General Mann in the 1953 classic adaptation of H.G. Wells' novel, *The War of the Worlds* co-starring Gene Barry and Ann Robinson. Tremayne was the narrator for the sci-fi classic *Forbidden Planet* (1956). He also narrated the U.S. versions of *Rodan* (1956), and *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962). He starred in *The Monolith Monsters* (1957), *The Monster of Piedras Blancas* (1959), the original version of MGM's special effects cult classic *The Angry Red Planet* (1960) and the forgettable horror schlock film *The Slime People* (1962).

Tremayne acted in other cinema genres as well. He co-starred with Irene Dunne and Richard Crenna in the comedy *It Grows On Trees* (1952), and starred in the Maureen O'Hara comedy *Everything But the Truth* (1956). Also among his movie roles, Tremayne played the auctioneer in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), he voiced a radio newsman in the James Bond film *Goldfinger* (1964) and he had a small role in director Billy Wilder's *The Fortune Cookie* (1966).

Tremayne even found success making appearances or voice-overs for television. He was a regular on *One Man's Family* (1950), made various appearances on *Perry Mason*, played Inspector Richard Queen on the 1958-'59 NBC series *Ellery Queen* and also played Mr. Mentor on the children's TV series *Shazam!* (1974). He provided voices on the children's cartoons *Mr. Magoo* (1964), *The Smurfs* (1981) and *Jonny Quest* (1986).

It is documented that in various polls, he was voted the No. 1 dramatic actor in the highly popular commercial medium and he was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame in 1995.

-John Gibbon