Ben Wright

Brian Kavanaugh

Benjamin Huntington Wright was an English actor best known for his role as Herr Zeller in *The Sound of Music,* and the voices of Roger Radcliff and Sir Grimsby in *101 Dalmatians* and *The Little Mermaid*, respectively. Wright was born May 15, 1915, in London, the United Kingdom to an American father and an English mother. He entered the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts at age 16 and upon graduation began appearing in several West End theatrical productions. Wright served in the King’s Royal Rifle Corps during World War II.

In 1946 Wright came to the United States to attend a cousin’s wedding and decided to move to California. He started his American acting career in radio, quickly becoming in demand for his talent for accents and dialects. Among his many roles, he was the final actor to play Sherlock Holmes on American radio (1949–50), the Indian servant Tulku on *The Green Lama* (1949), he was Inspector Peter Black on *Pursuit* (1951–52), the Chinese bellhop “Hey Boy” on the radio version of *Have Gun—Will Travel* (1958), and various roles on series such as *Escape*, *Nightbeat*, *Gunsmoke*, *Crime Classics*, and *Suspense.* In a strange coincidence, he auditioned for the part of J.B. Kendall in the first pilot of *Frontier Gentleman* before John Dehner received the role in that series, which led immediately to the role of Paladin in *Have Gun—Will Travel*.

His most famous film role was as Herr Zeller in *The Sound of Music* (1965), but he also had minor roles in *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), *My Fair Lady* (1964), and *The Fortune Cookie* (1966). He also regularly guest-starred on television, appearing in *My Three Sons*, *Hogan’s Heroes*, *McHale’s Navy, Combat!, Get Smart, Bonanza*, and many more. He had recurring roles on *Gunsmoke* as the billiard parlor owner Dan Binney and the town barber Birger Engdohl, along with several other one-off roles throughout the course of the series.

Wright also worked as a voice actor in film and television. He often provided alien voices for the television series *The Outer Limits*. In film, he was the narrator in *Cleopatra* (1963), the BBC announcer in *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), and was in some Disney animated films, including *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961) as Roger Radcliff and *The Jungle Book* (1967) as Mowgli’s wolf father, Rama.

Ben Wright’s final role was the voice of Sir Grimsby in the Disney movie *The Little Mermaid* (1989). A few months later, on June 23, 1989, he went to St. Joseph Medical Center in Burbank, California, for quadruple bypass surgery and never recovered. He died on July 2, 1989, and was survived by his wife Muriel, a son, and a daughter.

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