Michael Redgrave - biography

Michael Scudamore Redgrave was born on March 20, 1908 in Bristol, England. His father was a silent movie star, Roy Redgrave, and his mother, Margaret Scudamore, was also an actress. His father deserted his family and moved to Australia. Michael was six-months old. His father died there when Michael was fourteen. His mother had remarried Captain James Anderson, a tea planter, whom, it is said, Redgrave greatly disliked.

Redgrave would study at Clifton College and Magdalene College in Cambridge and went on to teach drama at a private boys’ school until 1934. He then decided to become an actor at the age of 25. He played with a Liverpool repertory company for a year or so, where he met his future wife Rachel Kempson. They married on July 18, 1935. He then he was invited to perform at the Old Vic in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labours Lost* in 1936, and later would play Laertes opposite Laurence Olivier's Hamlet. His first television role was in 1937 in scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*, and his big movie breakthrough was in Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Lady Vanishes* (1938).

He tended to act in dramas rather than comedies, playing both modern and classic roles. He was nominated for an Oscar for his role in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (co-starring Rosalind Russell). Still, he was a fine comedian. He is remembered fondly for his portrayal of Earnest Worthing in the 1952 film adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

His career spanned the theater, the movies, the radio, and television. And he was exceedingly active after World War II. While working a punishing schedule of theatrical and movie engagements, he managed to find the time to act in both British and American radio shows.

A few of his surviving radio appearances include two *Studio* *One* productions: “Uncle Harry” from March 2, 1948, and “The Return of the Native” from June 15, 1948. He also appeared on *The Pabst Show* (June 8, 1948). In the early 1950s, he starred twice on *Theater Guild of the Air* in “The Unguarded Hour” and in “Jane”. But he is best known to radio fans as the icily controlled Horatio Hornblower on the British radio series, *The Adventures of Horatio Hornblower*. The series ran for fifty-two shows from July 7, 1952 - July 17, 1953.

Redgrave also appeared twice on *Desert Island Discs*: October 6, 1945 and June 28, 1955. However, these recordings appear to be lost.

In 1957, he starred in the *ABC Mystery Time* production of “The Overcoat,”. In 1962, he both directed and starred in audio adaptations of *MacBeth* and *Hamlet,* and starred in *Richard II* for the Living Shakespeare series. He also participated in “A Homage to Shakespeare” with Laurence Olivier, which was 1964 recording celebrating the Globe’s 400th anniversary.

He was knighted in 1959 for his contributions to the British Empire.

After a long and richly varied career, Michael Redgrave died of Parkinson’s Disease in his home on March 21, 1985. Redgrave was 77. He was survived by his wife of 50 years, Rachel Kempson, and their three children, Corin, Vanessa, and Lynn Redgrave, and several grandchildren.