

= Ron Taylor (actor) =

Ronald James " Ron " Taylor (October 16 , 1952 ? January 16 , 2002) was an American actor , singer and writer . He grew up in Galveston , Texas and later moved to New York to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts . After graduating , Taylor began working in musical theater , appearing in The Wiz (1977) , before getting his break with the 1982 off @-@ Broadway production Little Shop of Horrors . Taylor voiced the killer plant Audrey II in the show , which ran for five years and over 2 @, @ 000 performances .

Taylor created and starred in the musical revue It Ain 't Nothin ' But the Blues , which charted the history of blues music from its African origin to American success . Originally performed at high schools in Denver as a 45 @-@ minute piece , the revue was expanded to two hours , played around the country and opened on Broadway in 1999 . It was met with critical acclaim , ran for eight months , and saw Taylor receive two Tony Award nominations .

He also had numerous television roles , appearing in The Simpsons , Twin Peaks , Ally McBeal and L.A. Law . His performance in the latter , as a singer who performed the American national anthem " The Star @-@ Spangled Banner " at baseball games , led him to perform the anthem at several real @-@ life sporting events . Taylor was married and had one son . He died in January 2002 after suffering a heart attack .

= = Early life = =

Ronald James Taylor was born on October 16 , 1952 in Galveston , Texas to Marian and Robert " Bruno " Taylor and had two sisters , Roberta and Frances . He attended O 'Connell High School , and Wharton County Junior College , where he was a football player , and a participant in the school choir and theater . The choir teacher suggested he join after overhearing him singing The Temptations . He favoured music over football , and at the age of 19 attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York , intending to become a singer .

= = Career = =

= = = Theater = = =

= = = = Early theater work = = = =

Taylor , a " barrel @-@ chested bass @-@ baritone " , had an extensive career in musical theater . Upon graduating from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts , Taylor was unable to read sheet music and could " barely " play the piano , but found work as a singer . In 1977 he played the Cowardly Lion in a national touring production of The Wiz . Taylor subsequently played Great Big Baby in the 1978 Broadway production Eubie ! and Caiaphas in a performance of Jesus Christ Superstar .

He voiced Audrey II , the " street @-@ smart , funky , conniving " talking killer plant which is an " anthropomorphic cross between a Venus flytrap and an avocado " , in the original off @-@ Broadway production of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken 's " black @-@ comedy musical " Little Shop of Horrors from 1982 . Audrey II was played by four increasingly large puppets , operated by Martin P. Robinson , while Taylor sat in a box at the back of the stage to voice the role , standing to perform his musical numbers . The two kept in close proximity to ensure " that voice and action are always synchronized " and " developed a rapport " which was " the only thing that allow [ed] the character to really bloom . " Taylor disliked sitting in the box as it left him feeling disconnected from the audience . The part was his break and was described by Jesse McKinley of The New York Times as " a role Mr. Taylor 's booming voice was made for ... [he] soon put his stamp on Audrey 's signature line : ' Feed me , feed me ! ' " Members of the public often used the line when they saw

Taylor . Little Shop of Horrors was performed over 2000 times before it closed in 1987 . At the 1983 Drama Desk Awards , Taylor won the award for Outstanding Special Effects for his performance , which he shared with Robinson .

In the 1984 Broadway production of The Three Musketeers at The Broadway Theatre , Taylor played Porthos , one of the three title characters . After fifteen preview performances , the show ran just nine times before closing . Frank Rich wrote that the musketeers were " professionally played " by Taylor and his co -@-@ stars Brent Spiner and Chuck Wagner but felt the three had " little dialogue and often seem like interchangeable stand @-@ ins for the Three Stooges . " A similar view was held by William B. Collins of the Philadelphia Inquirer who said they " speak as in one voice and behave like comedians who have been stranded without good material . "

= = = = It Ain 't Nothin ' But the Blues = = = =

Taylor created and starred in the musical revue It Ain 't Nothin ' But the Blues , which charted the history of blues music from its African origin to American success . He conceived the original idea for the show when he played blues musician Rufus Payne in a 1987 production of Lost Highway , a play about singer Hank Williams at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts in Denver , Colorado . He proposed the idea to director Randal Myler who eventually accepted it in 1994 . Taylor co @-@ wrote the revue with Myler , Lita Gaithers , Charles Bevel and Dan Wheetman , and also served as its associate producer . Taylor was the revue 's lead singer and acted as its narrator ; his numbers included " I 'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man " , " The Thrill is Gone " , " Blues Man " and " Let the Good Times Roll " . It was initially performed as a 45 @-@ minute production at 25 local high schools . Because of their positive reception , the show was expanded to two hours and 50 songs , with three people being added to the original cast of four , and was regularly performed at the Denver Center .

Taylor described the performance as " very cordial " , with the audience close to performers , and that " one show is never the same as the next because of the songs , of what they are . Blues is about how you feel today . One day , you 're down ; another day is real happy and giddy . We 're all laughing . Randy 's direction captures that . It 's always so personal , bringing the audience into the piece . " As well as African music , the revue includes " country , gospel , the old blues , Appalachian music , " featuring music by Patsy Cline , Brenda Lee , Mahalia Jackson , Jimmy Rogers , Nina Simone and Muddy Waters .

In 1995 , the revue ran for a month at the Cleveland Play House , in conjunction with the opening of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum , before touring at other regional theaters . It played at the Crossroads Theatre in New Jersey for seven weeks in November 1998 and opened off @-@ Broadway at New York 's New Victory Theater in March 1999 , presented by Crossroads Theatre , in association with San Diego Repertory Theatre and Alabama Shakespeare Festival . It was met with critical and audience acclaim and the following month moved to Broadway to the Vivian Beaumont Theater . New York Times critic Lawrence Van Gelder wrote that the show had a " cornucopia of splendidly interpreted song , " and " is a potent blend of visual eloquence and historical sweep that engages the eye and touches the heart while its songs soothe the ear , occasionally work mischief on the funny bone , and always raise the spirits . "

A week after opening at the Beaumont , the show received four Tony Award nominations , with Taylor being nominated for Best Performance by a Featured Actor in a Musical and Best Book of a Musical . The cast 's performance on the live Tony Awards show on CBS was bumped due to limited time , sparking controversy , costing the show potential revenue , and damaging its prospects for survival . The cast performed two days later on the CBS talkshow Late Show with David Letterman , while media attention and radio coverage of the Tony snub boosted the show 's takings for the following two weeks . This did not last and did not " build a long @-@ lasting audience like the Tonys could " , leading to dwindling attendance . A large word @-@ of @-@ mouth networking campaign to advertise the performance was set up by the producers and the show moved to the Ambassador Theatre , where the box office takes began to break even . The show closed in January 2000 after a total run of eight months on Broadway .

For the rest of the year , It Ain 't Nothin ' But the Blues again toured at regional theaters , running in Atlanta , San Diego , and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. , and returning to New York in August 2000 at the B.B. King Blues Club and Grill for a month @-@ long run . Jim Trageser of The Press @-@ Enterprise , in a review of one of the San Diego performances , praised Taylor , saying he " has the lung power to simply take over any show , especially his own " and " shows surprising grace and athleticism as well as the kind of leonine masculinity that certain big men (Orson Welles , Babe Ruth) possess " . Trageser also praised the writing , calling it " a superb job not only of selecting the songs , but in choosing arrangements that blow away all the cobwebs history has laid on many of them . "

It Ain 't Nothin ' But the Blues was the longest @-@ running show Taylor appeared in , as well as his final Broadway appearance . Taylor planned an IMAX film version of the production ; and nine years after his death , it was revived by the New Haarlem Arts Theater at the Aaron Davis Hall on the City College of New York campus .

= = = Film , television and music = = =

Taylor had numerous television roles . He voiced jazz musician " Bleeding Gums " Murphy on The Simpsons , appearing in the first season episode " Moaning Lisa " (1990) and returning for the character 's death in the season six episode " ' Round Springfield " (1995) . He was one of the first people to guest star on the show . Taylor was supposed to reprise his role in the season two episode " Dancin ' Homer " , but was in New York and unable to record his part . Keith Phipps of The A.V. Club said the role gave Taylor " television immortality " . He also reprised the role on a recording of Billie Holiday 's song " God Bless the Child " on the 1990 The Simpsons ' album The Simpsons Sing the Blues . He appeared as a Klingon chef in Star Trek : Deep Space Nine , and played wrestling instructor Coach Wingate in Twin Peaks . He received an in memoriam at the end of " Sweets and Sour Marge , " with an image of the Bleeding Gums Murphy character and the text " Ron Taylor 1952 @-@ 2002 " (season 13 , episode 9) . This was the first episode after his death and unrelated to the episode topic of " big sugar . " Other television roles included guest spots on NYPD Blue , ER , Profiler , Family Matters , Home Improvement and Ally McBeal . Taylor also had a recurring part in the 2000 series City of Angels , and played a blues singer in a two @-@ part episode of Matlock , a role that was written for him . He also appeared in more than 20 films . These included Trading Places , Amos & Andrew , A Rage in Harlem (as Hank) , The Mighty Quinn and Rush Hour 2 .

After a 1991 appearance on the series L.A. Law , on which he played a singer sacked by a baseball team for " embellish [ing] " his performances of the American national anthem " The Star @-@ Spangled Banner " , Taylor received several invitations to sing it before sports events , although never expected anything to happen when he had taken the part . He sang it before the Major League Baseball game between the Baltimore Orioles and Detroit Tigers on July 1 , 1991 . His rendition did not mimic that of his character : " the song is self @-@ explanatory . I 'm just going to sing the song straightforwardly and that 's that . " Taylor received travel and accommodation expenses but no other payment for his performance . He also sang for a Los Angeles Kings National Hockey League game , and on August 5 , 1995 he sang the anthem before the MLB match between the Cleveland Indians and Chicago White Sox .

Taylor was part of the blues group The Nervis Bros and performed across the United States . He also sang with Billy Joel , Bruce Springsteen , Etta James , Slash and Sheila E ..

= = Personal life = =

Taylor met DeBorah Sharpe in 1977 during the production of The Wiz where she was the understudy for Dorothy . They married in 1980 and had a son , Adamah . In his spare time , Taylor often helped teach vulnerable young people through a variety of projects , including at the George Street Playhouse in New Jersey . He noted " things have come out of the air for me ... I 'm grateful ; that 's why I work with kids . I 've had a blessing in my career , to have gone as far as I 've gone . " A

1995 piece in The Plain Dealer described Taylor as " A jolly giant of a man , he looks like a natural force ? a mountain , perhaps , who can tell great stories . " Taylor was a Christian .

Taylor suffered a small stroke in 1999 ; he was able to perform again in It Ain 't Nothin ' But the Blues 73 days later . He died of a heart attack aged 49 , on January 16 , 2002 , at his home in Los Angeles , California . His funeral took place on January 28 at the New Christ Memorial Church of God and Christ .

= = Filmography = =

= = = Films = = =

= = = Television = = =

= = = Video games = = =

Ready 2 Rumble Boxing ? voice (1999)