

MUSIC & MOVIES



In this Aug 27, 1981 file photo, Gilda Radner, center, and Gene Wilder, right, perform in a scene from the film 'Hanky Panky,' directed by Sidney Poitier in Boston. — AP photos



This file photo taken on September 7, 1984 shows US actor and director Gene Wilder poses with his wife Gilda Radner, during the 10th American Film Festival of Deauville.



Actor Gene Wilder, star of Mel Brooks movies, dies at 83



In a Dec 27, 1977 file photo, actor Gene Wilder looks thoughtful during an interview in New York.

Gene Wilder, the frizzy-haired actor who brought his deft comedic touch to such unforgettable roles as the neurotic accountant in "The Producers" and the mad scientist of "Young Frankenstein," has died. He was 83. Wilder's nephew said Monday that the actor and writer died late Sunday at his home in Stamford, Connecticut, of complications from Alzheimer's disease. No funeral arrangements have been announced. Jordan Walker-Pearlman said in a statement that Wilder was diagnosed with the disease three years ago, but kept the condition private so as not to disappoint fans.

Wilder started his acting career on the stage, but millions knew him from his work in the movies, especially his collaborations with Mel Brooks on "The Producers," "Blazing Saddles" and "Young Frankenstein." The last film - with Wilder playing a California-born descendant of the mad scientist, insisting that his name is pronounced "Frah-ken-SHTEEN" - was co-written by Brooks and Wilder and earned the pair an Oscar nomination for adapted screenplay. "Gene Wilder, one of the truly great talents of our time, is gone," Brooks wrote in a statement Monday. "He blessed every film we did together with his special magic and he blessed my life with his friendship. He will be so missed." With his unkempt hair and big, buggy eyes, Wilder was a master at playing panicked characters caught up in schemes that only a madman such as Brooks could devise, whether reviving a monster in "Young Frankenstein" or bliking Broadway in "The Producers." Brooks would call him "God's perfect prey, the victim in all of us."



In a Dec 9, 1977 file photo, actor Gene Wilder is shown during an interview with Jean Claude Bouis at his New York City Hotel.

Funniest and sweetest energies

But he also knew how to keep it cool as the boozing gunslinger in "Blazing Saddles" or the charming candy man in the children's favorite "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory." His craziest role: the therapist having an affair with a sheep in Woody Allen's "Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex." Tweeted Jim Carrey: "Gene Wilder was one of the funniest and sweetest energies ever to



This file photo taken on March 17, 2008 shows actor and author Gene Wilder posing with copies of his new book 'The Woman Who Wouldn't' at Barnes & Noble Bookstore at The Grove in West Hollywood, California.

take a human form. If there's a heaven he has a Golden Ticket."

Cloris Leachman, Wilder's "Young Frankenstein" co-star, tweeted, "Oh, Gene, it's too soon!" Wilder was close friends with Richard Pryor and their contrasting personas - Wilder uptight, Pryor loose - were ideal for comedy. They co-starred in four films: "Silver Streak," "Stir Crazy," "See No Evil, Hear No Evil" and "Another You." And they created several memorable scenes, particularly when Pryor provided Wilder with directions on how to "act black" as they tried to avoid police in "Silver Streak." But Wilder would insist he was no comedian. He told Robert Osborne in a 2013 interview that it was the biggest misconception about him.

Nothing special

"What a comic, what a funny guy, all that stuff! And I'm not. I'm really not. Except in a comedy in films," Wilder said. "But I make my wife laugh once or twice in the house, but nothing special. But when people see me in a movie and it's funny then they stop and say things to me about 'how funny you were.' But I don't think I'm that funny. I think I can be in the movies." A Milwaukee native, Wilder was born Jerome Silberman on June 11, 1933. When he was 6, his mother suffered a heart attack that left her a semi-invalid. He soon began improvising comedy skits to entertain her, the first indication of his future career. He started taking acting classes at age 12. In 1961, he became a member of Lee Strasberg's prestigious Actor's Studio in Manhattan.

That same year, he made both his off-Broadway and Broadway debuts using the stage name Gene Wilder. He won the Clarence Derwent Award, given to promising newcomers, for the Broadway work in Graham Greene's comedy "The Complaisant Lover." A key break came in 1963 when he co-starred with Anne Bancroft in Bertolt Brecht's "Mother Courage," and met Brooks, her future husband. Brooks cast Wilder in "The Producers" as Leo Bloom, an accountant who discovers the liberating joys of greed and corruption as he and Max Bialystock (Zero Mostel) conceive a Broadway flop titled

"Springtime for Hitler" and plan to flee with the money raised for the show's production. Wilder's performance received a supporting actor Oscar nod.

Outstanding guest actor

Before starring in "The Producers," he had a small role as the hostage of gangsters in the 1967 classic "Bonnie and Clyde." He peaked in the mid-1970s with the twin Brooks hits "Blazing Saddles" and "Young Frankenstein." Wilder went on to write several screenplays and direct five features, including "The Woman in Red" and "Haunted HoneyMoon," in which he co-starred with his third wife, Gilda Radner. The two met while making the 1982 film "Hanky-Panky" and married in 1984. After Radner died of ovarian cancer in 1989, Wilder spent much of his time after promoting cancer research and opened a support facility for cancer patients. In 1991, he testified before Congress about the need for increased testing for cancer.

That same year, he appeared in his final film role: "Another You" with Pryor. Wilder worked mostly in television in recent years, including appearances on "Will & Grace" one of which earned him an Emmy Award for outstanding guest actor - and a starring role in the short-lived sitcom "Something Wilder." In 2015, he was among the voices in the animated "The Yo Gabba Gabba! Movie 2." As for why he stopped appearing on the big screen, Wilder said in 2013 he was turned off by the noise and foul language in modern movies. "I didn't want to do the kind of junk I was seeing," he said in an interview. "I didn't want to do 3D for instance. I didn't want to do ones where there's just bombing and loud and swearing, so much swearing... can't they just stop and talk instead of swearing?" Wilder is survived by his wife, Karen, whom he married in 1991, and his daughter from a previous marriage, Katherine, from whom he was estranged. — AP

Gene Wilder: 30 years of laughter

Gene Wilder, who died on Monday following a battle with Alzheimer's, left behind a body of work that began 50 years ago and includes some of the greatest ever comedies. Here are 10 of his landmark roles:

- 1. "Death of a Salesman" (1966)**
Alex Segal's Emmy Award-winning adaptation for television of Arthur Miller's iconic play, starring Lee J. Cobb from the original 1949 Broadway cast as Willy Loman. Wilder played Bernard, the son of Loman's neighbor.
- 2. "Bonnie and Clyde" (1967)**
Wilder portrays Eugene Grizzard, one of the fugitive duo's hostages, in his big screen debut.
- 3. "The Producers" (1968)**
Wilder was nominated for a best supporting actor Oscar for the first of his many collaborations with legendary filmmaker Mel Brooks.
- 4. "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory" (1971)**
Wilder plays candy impresario Willy Wonka in perhaps his most celebrated role. Legend has it-incorrectly that Fred Astaire was in the running for the part. Ron Moody and Jon Pertwee were considered before Wilder was chosen.
- 5. "Blazing Saddles" (1974)**
Mel Brooks's searing satire of racism and depictions of the American Old West and the collaboration that nearly never was. Oscar-winning Gig Young was cast as the Waco Kid, but he collapsed during his first scene and Wilder was flown in to replace him.
- 6. "Young Frankenstein" (1974)**
An affectionate parody of the horror genre in which Wilder plays a descendant of Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein. Another Mel Brooks collaboration and another Oscar nomination, this time for the script he wrote with the director.
- 7. "The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother" (1975)**
A musical comedy remarkable only for the fact that it was Wilder's directorial debut. "Wilder seems to be taking things somewhat seriously, yet the details are often so obscured, you never get around to caring all that much," concludes a reviewer on the Classic Movie Guide website.
- 8. "Stir Crazy" (1980)**
With Sidney Poitier at the helm, Wilder delivers a bravura performance in this prison comedy that reunited him with Richard Pryor after "Silver Streak" (1976) and was a huge hit. The box office total marked the first time a film directed by an African-American earned more than \$100 million.
- 9. "The Woman in Red" (1984)**
Another movie directed by and starring Wilder that won an Oscar for best original song-"I Just Called to Say I Love You," written and performed by Stevie Wonder. Wilder started a relationship with co-star Gilda Radner, who became his third wife in 1984.
- 10. "Will and Grace" (1997)**
With his big screen career behind him, Wilder guest-starred on two episodes of NBC's "Will and Grace," winning an Emmy Award for outstanding guest actor on a comedy series. — AFP

'Beauty and the Beast' producer posts character images



In this July 31, 2011, file photo, actor Dan Stevens poses for a portrait in Beverly Hills, Calif. — AP

A producer on the upcoming live-action adaptation of "Beauty and the Beast" has invited his social media followers to be his guest to a first look at several characters from the film. "Beauty and the Beast" co-producer Jack Morrissey posted images on his Facebook account Friday of computer-generated renditions of Ewan McGregor as candelabra Lumiere and Ian McKellen as clock Cogsworth, as well as Dan Stevens in his human prince form.

Morrissey says the images are from a sneak preview that will be included in the 25th anniversary edition of the 1991 animated "Beauty and the Beast" out Sept 20. Emma Watson, who plays protagonist Belle, was previously glimpsed in a teaser trailer released earlier this summer. Disney's live-action "Beauty and the Beast" is set for release March 17, 2017. — AP



In this March 14, 2016, file photo, Carol Kane attends a special screening of 'Everything Is Copy' at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. — AP

Kane says Gene Wilder gave her a second chance

At age 23, Carol Kane was fresh off a Best Actress Oscar nomination with no prospects on the horizon. The phone hadn't rung for a year, she said. Then Gene Wilder called. "Out of the blue I got a call from Gene saying that he'd like to meet me about 'The World's Greatest Lover,'" Kane said Monday. "(It) was a comedy, which I'd never done before. I have no idea why he thought I could do it, but he was a purist, he was kind of a poet and I met him and he asked me to do this movie with him."

Wilder, who died Sunday at 83, wrote, directed and starred in "The World's Greatest Lover," about a baker (Wilder) and his wife (Kane) who move to Hollywood during the silent film era to enter a talent search for someone who might compete with Rudolph Valentino. Kane, 64, was only 25 by the time it wrapped, but getting that call from Wilder still felt to her like "a second chance," she said.

She remembers Wilder being compassionate and inspirational as a director but serious and sensitive, too. "(He was) clearly one the

great clowns - the Chaplin of talkies in some ways," she said. "The World's Greatest Lover" was not particularly well-received when it came out in 1977. Kane thinks it might not have gotten the right publicity. "It was a little under the radar unfortunately," she said. "But I think that it holds up beautifully and that it's lovely and funny and worth a second look." Kane would stay in touch with Wilder on and off over the years, and she loved seeing the friendship of Wilder, Mel Brooks and Dom DeLuise (who also starred in "The World's Greatest Lover" as the studio mogul).

Wilder and Kane reunited in 2001 to perform in three classic one-act farces at the Westport Country Playhouse, but she'll always remember the great significance of that phone call more than 40 years ago. "He was a gentle man and a gentleman ... a true, true artist," Kane said. "We never saw anyone like him before or after." — AP