

Oscar-winning U.S. actor Alan Arkin dies at 89



Oscar-winning actor Alan Arkin, seen here attending a premiere in November 2018, had a long career that included numerous drama and comedy films [File: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters]

Hollywood, July 1 (RHC)-- Alan Arkin, the wry character actor who demonstrated his versatility in comedy and drama as he received four Academy Award nominations and won an Oscar in 2007 for Little Miss Sunshine, has died. He was 89.

His sons, Adam, Matthew and Anthony, confirmed their father's death on Thursday through the actor's publicist. "Our father was a uniquely talented force of nature, both as an artist and a man," they said in a statement on Friday.

A member of Chicago's famed Second City comedy troupe, Arkin was an immediate success in movies with the Cold War spoof *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming*, and he peaked late in life with his win as best supporting actor for the surprise 2006 hit *Little Miss Sunshine*. More than 40 years separated his first Oscar nomination for *The Russians Are Coming* from his final nomination for playing a conniving Hollywood producer in the Oscar-winning *Argo*.

In recent years, he starred opposite Michael Douglas in the Netflix comedy series *The Kominsky Method*, a role that earned him two Emmy nominations.

Arkin once joked to *The Associated Press* that the beauty of being a character actor was not having to take his clothes off for a role. He wasn't a sex symbol or superstar but was rarely out of work, appearing in more than 100 TV and feature films. His trademarks were likability, relatability and complete immersion in his roles, no matter how unusual, whether playing a Russian submarine officer in *The Russians Are Coming* who struggles to communicate with the equally jittery Americans or standing out as the foul-mouthed, drug-addicted grandfather in *Little Miss Sunshine*.

"Alan's never had an identifiable screen personality because he just disappears into his characters," director Norman Jewison of *The Russians Are Coming* once observed. "His accents are impeccable, and he's even able to change his looks.. ... He's always been underestimated, partly because he's never been in service of his own success."

While still with Second City, Arkin was chosen by Carl Reiner to play the young protagonist in the 1963 Broadway play *Enter Laughing*, based on Reiner's semi-autobiographical novel.

He attracted strong reviews and the notice of Jewison, who was preparing to direct a 1966 comedy about a Russian sub that creates a panic when it ventures too close to a small New England town. In Arkin's next major film, he proved he could also play a villain, however reluctantly. Arkin starred in *Wait Until Dark* as a vicious drug dealer who holds a blind woman (Audrey Hepburn) captive in her own apartment, believing a drug shipment is hidden there.

In 1968's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Arkin played a sensitive man who could not hear or speak. The role again elevated Arkin's status in Hollywood. He starred as the bumbling French detective in *Inspector Clouseau* that same year, but the film would become overlooked in favour of Peter Sellers's *Clouseau* in the *Pink Panther* movies.

Arkin's career as a character actor continued to blossom when Mike Nichols, a fellow Second City alumnus, cast him in the starring role as Rossarian, the victim of wartime red tape in 1970's *Catch-22*, based on Joseph Heller's million-selling novel.

Recent credits included *Going in Style*, a 2017 remake featuring fellow Oscar winners Michael Caine and Morgan Freeman and *The Kominsky Method*. He played a Hollywood talent agent and friend of Douglas's character, a once promising actor who ran an acting school after his career sputtered.

Born in the New York City borough of Brooklyn, he and his family, which included two younger brothers, moved to Los Angeles when he was 11. His parents found jobs as teachers but were fired during the post-World War II Red Scare because they were Communists.

"We were dirt poor, so I couldn't afford to go to the movies often," Arkin told the AP in 1998. "But I went whenever I could and focused in on movies as they were more important than anything in my life."

He studied acting at Los Angeles City College; California State University, Los Angeles; and Bennington College in Vermont, where he earned a scholarship to the formerly all women's school. He married a fellow student, Jeremy Yaffe, and they had two sons, Adam and Matthew.

After he and Yaffe divorced in 1961, Arkin married actress-writer Barbara Dana, and they had a son, Anthony. All three sons became actors. Adam starred in the TV series Chicago Hope.

"It was certainly nothing that I pushed them into," Arkin said in 1998. "It made absolutely no difference to me what they did as long as it allowed them to grow."

Dana and Arkin divorced in 1994, and in 1996, Arkin married Suzanne Newlander, who survives him.

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