

Personal journeys

THE EXTRAORDINARY LIVES OF PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Ingham

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one of them. First morning on stage, Judi Dench was playing Ophelia, and the rest is history.”

That history includes 16 plays with Oscar-winner Dench, who is one of Ingham’s dearest friends, 11 leading roles for the Royal Shakespeare Company, five leading roles on Broadway, two roles on “Doctor Who,” one notable guest spot on “Star Trek: The Next Generation” and hundreds of other TV and film appearances.

Yet, Barrie Ingham is best known for the “cheap Basil Rathbone imitation” he made famous as Basil of Baker Street, the star of Disney’s 1986 cartoon “The Great Mouse Detective.”

Ingham is unlikely to teach a class on eloquent British rodents anytime soon, but he celebrates Basil’s language, nonetheless, especially since those residual checks keep rolling in: “Long may he squeak!”

THE LEADING MAN: From Shakespeare to “the poor man’s Michael Caine”

Where Barrie Ingham comes from – West Yorkshire, England – residents don’t even talk properly, let alone recite Shakespeare.

“We talk with short ‘A’s’ versus long ones,” explains Ingham, “and we have a superiority complex, too. But we always win at cricket.”

A two-year stint in the Royal Artillery lengthened his “A’s” – and helped create his acting career.

“Suddenly I was on a horse and in a parade, so I had to get very posh ... like Prince Charles. This was my training, and as an actor I instinctively learned to speak proper English, so that by the time I got home, my own father couldn’t understand me. Life had become long ‘A’s.’”

Not only had Ingham’s English accent changed, but he decided to pass on working in the family business of retailing.

“I got to live the upper-class British life in the army and then moved it to the stage.”

Like his friend Judi Dench, he became obsessed with the art of acting, expanding his career from Shakespeare to the musicals of London’s West End, where he starred opposite Angela Lansbury (in “Gypsy”), Maggie Smith and Sarah Brightman.

“Musicals to me are like Shakespeare is on stage ... big and rewarding,” Ingham says. “I did Andrew Lloyd Webber’s ‘Aspects of Love.’ There’s something about Webber’s music. The audience’s solar plexus gets hit with a sense of shock. Rodgers and Hammerstein knew how to do it. Webber does it. Getting inside the audience and just tweaking their nervous system. Great writing is about that, too.”

But after the English stage, Ingham wanted to spread his wings – and that meant coming to America.

“My whole life in England had been connected with becoming a West End leading man, and then a leading man in musicals,” he says. “My ambitions to be a well-known actor in stage had been fulfilled, but the sky is, of course, always the limit.”

The University of Texas in Austin made him an offer to teach, “so I said ‘wonderful!’ and I could talk about what I know – Shakespeare and language, that type of thing. I became Professor Ingham.”

He remembers his family feeling mystified by watching the UT cheerleaders and football players out at practice at 7 a.m. on a field. “Such American vitality and vigor just hit me in the face. In England, people are rubbing their eyes and moping about until 7 a.m.”

Vitality, however, is the hallmark of an actor, as Sir Bernard Miles of London’s Mermaid Theatre in London once told Ingham.

“What is an actor? A person with excessive vitality prepared to sell it at a price to those with less vitality,” Ingham quotes Miles. “It’s a life force.”

Of course, this force requires words: “We’re useless without a script and a character.”

Eventually, Ingham found well-suited characters on Broadway, from “Copperfield” to “Camelot” and “My Fair Lady.”

“Then we did another crazy thing. ... I told my family ‘we should go to Hollywood,’ so we packed up the car and off we went,” says Ingham, acknowledging that he is a sort of virtual Forrest Gump.

He chuckles, “So true. I did so many stupid things in my life that turned out to be absolutely right.”

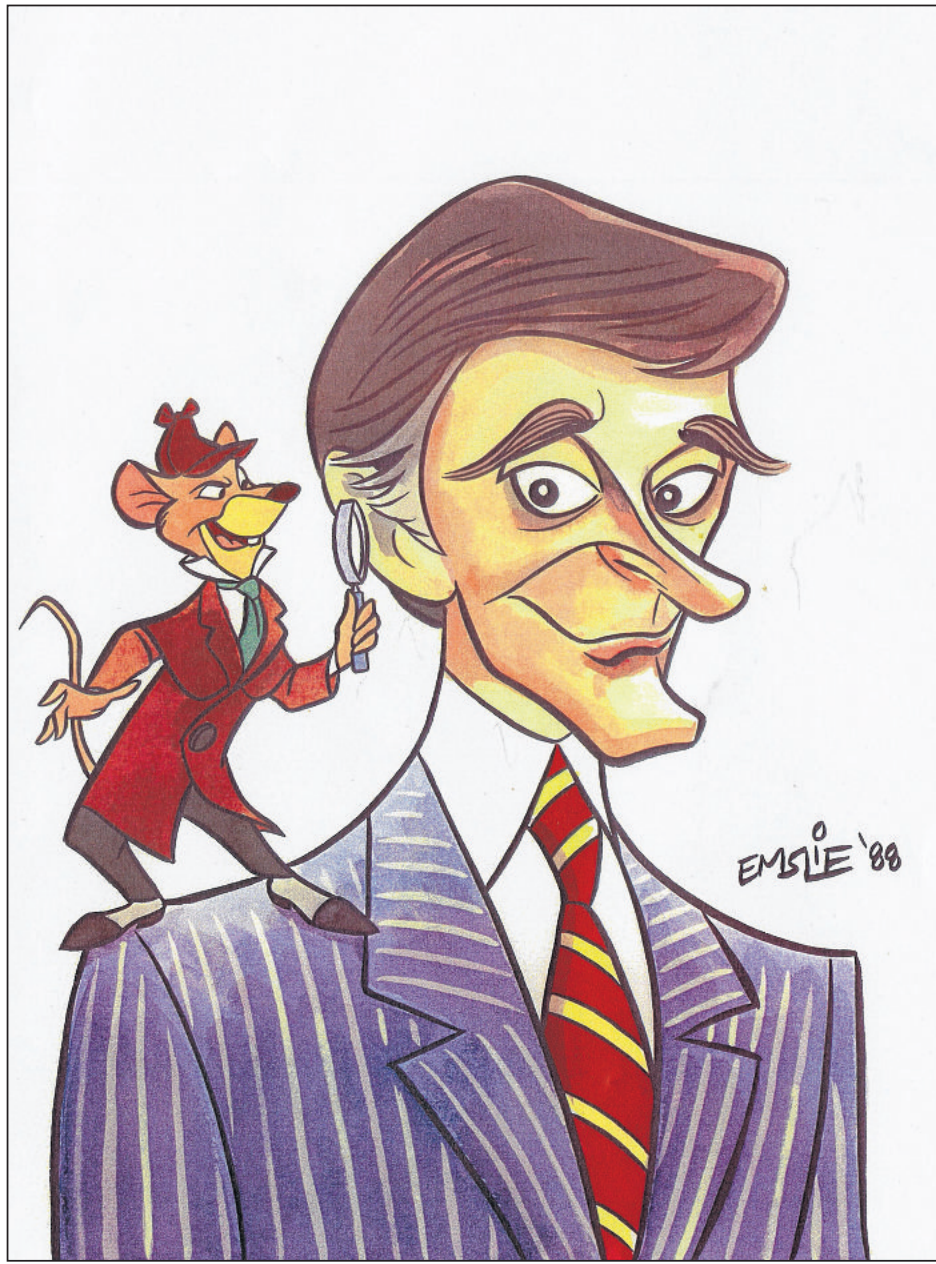
Next thing Ingham knew he was guest-starring on “The A Team” and “Murder She Wrote.”

“I was the poor man’s Michael Caine,” he says. “Every time they wanted an actor to play a crooked golf course manager who wore an ascot and a blazer, they rang me.”

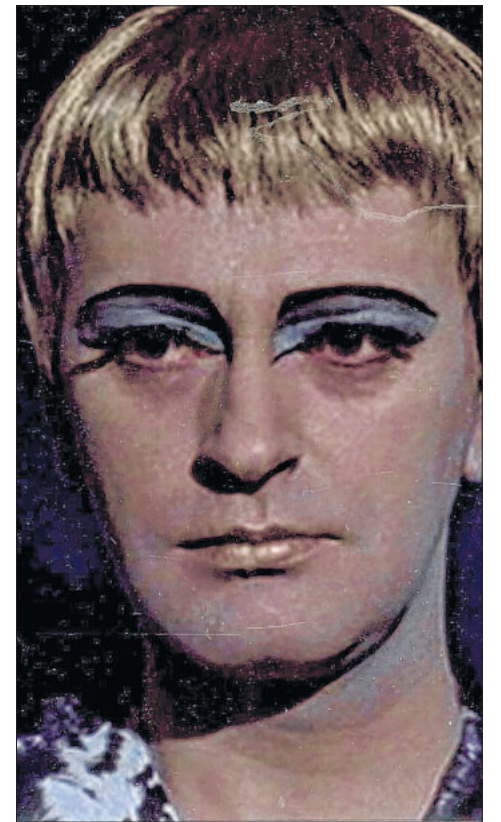
Disney called in 1986 to ask Ingham to voice the Sherlock Holmes of mice – “The Great Mouse Detective” – opposite Vincent Price.

The fact that he’s famous for playing a cartoon mouse is “ridiculous!” he laughs.

But since Disney re-released “The Great Mouse Detective” on Blu-ray and DVD in 2012, his fan mail has in-



Basil and Barrie: Ingham’s most famous role is as the voice of Basil, the hero of “The Great Mouse Detective.” Disney storybook illustrator Pete Emslie drew this caricature of the duo. Emslie has called that film one of his favorites in the post-Walt Disney age, since it retains the character of the classics, with “a charismatic yet flawed hero in Basil. Voice actor Barrie Ingham surely deserves some of the credit for that.” CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



“Doctor Who” and Barrie: Photos of Ingham playing Alydon in the movie “Dr. Who and the Daleks” are coveted at autograph conventions. “I look so precious” in blond wig and blue eyeshadow, Ingham chuckles.



Tarne and Barrie: Married since 1957, Tarne and Barrie Ingham have four daughters and live in Palm Beach Gardens. They met in repertory theater. Says Tarne, “I could never have given up theater – there was no way I could marry a bank manager. But because I was married to an actor, and he allowed me to become so involved in his work, that was OK.”



Angela and Barrie: Angela Lansbury is a “wonderful and dear friend ... I played with her in ‘Gypsy’ in London and couldn’t go on with her to Broadway. I didn’t have a green card,” Ingham recalls.

creased – and so have those residual checks.

“It was the last of the old Disney films with the hand-drawn animation. So it’s an historic one. It’s the marriage of the old animator and the new computer generation.”

And, let’s face it, Barrie Ingham does a hilarious mouse voice.

“Children come up to me and even middle-aged people come up to me, and all they want to talk of is the mouse! One little boy, about 3 feet tall, probably 6 years of age with a very deep voice like a gangster said, ‘Are you Basil Baker?’ and I said ‘yes,’ and he said, ‘Prove it. Talk like him.’ And I did. The boy nodded. ‘OK, you’re Basil.’”

THE SCI-FI PHENOM: How he almost became Capt. Picard

Barrie Ingham’s most passionate fans, however, are the ones who throng “Doctor Who” and “Star Trek” conventions.

To them, he is sci-fi royalty – one of a handful of actors who have played parts in both iconic science-fiction series.

They pay \$25 for an autographed photo of Ingham in blond wig and blue eyeshadow as Alydon in the 1965 film “Dr. Who and the Daleks” – “I look so precious” – or as Paris, a warrior from the first season of the BBC’s “Doctor

Who” TV show.

“Doctor Who” celebrated its 50th anniversary in November, and stills and soundtracks from the first season are coveted because the BBC, in a fit of non-futuristic recklessness, taped over that season of shows.

Ingham’s legacy on “Star Trek: The Next Generation” does live on – although not in the way it might have.

Ingham was up for the part of Capt. Jean-Luc Picard.

“The casting director wanted ‘a European accent,’ which could mean anything, and I thought I’ll go in with a slightly French accent,” he recalls. “As they do in Hollywood, they called me back for a second testing. Meanwhile, Patrick Stewart has come to UCLA to do some Shakespeare readings on a stage tour. The granddaughter of Gene Roddenberry said, ‘Grandfather, this blimey guy is coming to read Shakespeare in college,’ and Patrick comes on and does Shakespeare as only he can, and at the end of the class a man approaches him and says, ‘Hi, I’m Gene Roddenberry, and I’m going to do a new television series called ‘Star Trek: The Next Generation.’”

Stewart is a good friend of Ingham’s – they grew up together, doing Shake-

speare with Judi Dench and Ian McKellen.

“Patrick was busy gathering up papers in his briefcase and said, ‘Yeah, sure, and I’m Napoleon, and I’ve got a plane to catch.’ He thought Roddenberry was some nut posing as a producer.”

Ingham lost the captain role to Stewart but did end up with a funny part – and “signed a lot of autographs for it” – as Danilo Odell, a mad drunk Irishman who comes on the ship with a tribe of Irish women and his daughter, trying to marry her off.

The 1989 episode, “Up the Long Ladder,” is a fan favorite – “and, yes, the daughter does get married off.”

THE FAMILY MAN: “Shall we adopt a Thai baby?”

Tarne Ingham enters the room offering Yorkshire tea – “a proper tea” – a black tea blend produced by Bettys & Taylors of Harrogate, and one of the few remaining family tea merchants in the United Kingdom. Like the tea, the marriage of Tarne to Barrie in 1957 is one of the few remaining, too.

“She was an actress herself,” explains Ingham. “We met in weekly repertoire. “Once we got married and moved to London, I sensed she couldn’t have two actors in the house. Most male actors are on their second or third wife now.”

He stops to reflect on his wife before confessing. “Tarne sublimated her instincts into my career, which has been our career.”

Says Tarne, “I could never have given up theater – there was no way I could marry a bank manager. But because I was married to an actor, and he allowed me to become so involved in his work, that was OK. I also have poetry, and I love to write it. But a writer can write on paper, a painter can paint on a canvas, but an actor needs his stage and audience.”

Tarne has never lost her actor’s ability to deliver a line with perfect timing.

In 1979, she accompanied Barrie to Bangkok, where he and Susannah



The actor at home: “What is an actor? A person with excessive vitality prepared to sell it at a price to those with less vitality ... It’s a life force.” RICHARD GRAULICH / THE PALM BEACH POST

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