

Francis X. Bushman Of Silent Films Dies



Associated Press

Francis X. Bushman

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LOS ANGELES, Aug. 23—Francis X. Bushman, the romantic hero of the silent screen, died today after an accident in the kitchen of his home in suburban Pacific Palisades. An ambulance crew, summoned by his wife, Iva, pronounced him dead. He was 83 years old.

Mr. Bushman, who on Sunday had suffered a fall in his bath-

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Francis X. Bushman, Actor, Dies at 83

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room, had gone into his kitchen this morning to get a cup of coffee when he slipped and fell again, striking his head on a cupboard.

A coroner's autopsy indicated that his "death was due to a rupture of the heart."

The actor had re-established himself as the courtly master of ceremonies of a late movie television show on a local station in recent years. He was scheduled to have started a role today in a feature film at Paramount. Mr. Bushman was to have portrayed a saloon owner in "Huntsville," but the fall on Sunday had postponed it.

His agent, Louis Shurr, said that the actor had just completed an assignment in television's "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea" and was recently cast as a guest villain in the "Batman" series.

Charlton Heston, president of the Screen Actors Guild and who, like Mr. Bushman, starred in a film version of "Ben-Hur," said: "His passing marks the fall of one of the landmarks of Hollywood history. He represented all that was best in the tradition of Hollywood as well as of his own profession."

Mr. Bushman's death came on the 40th anniversary of the death of another romantic silent-screen actor, Rudolph Valentino.

'Handsome Man in the World'

Years before the women of America sighed over such film idols as Wallace Reid and Rudolph Valentino, they adored Francis X. Bushman, star of more than 400 films and known as "the handsomest man in the world."

From 1911 until 1918, moviegoers by the millions paid their nickels and dimes to gaze upon his classic profile and his muscular physique as he made passionate love to such actresses as Beverly Bayne, Billie Dove and Corinne Griffith in two-reelers that brought him more than \$6-million.

Mr. Bushman's off-screen performance matched the grandiloquence of his film roles. He spent his way into bankruptcy with \$100 tips to waiters, a lavender limousine, lavender cigarettes, servants in lavender. He had 18 secretaries for his fan mail and on his 280-acre estate outside Baltimore he kept Great Danes and race horses.

But it was not his extravagance that caused Mr. Bushman's downfall. His film career was ruined by the revelation in 1918 that he was a married man with five children, a secret that had been kept from his vast public in accordance with a clause in his movie contract.

The shattering truth emerged when his wife, the former Josephine Fladuene, brought a successful suit for divorce so that he could marry Beverly Bayne, his leading lady. As a result, his romantic identity was destroyed and his mail and movie offers vanished.

Capacity for Enjoyment

Looking back on this phase of his life more than four decades later, Mr. Bushman said, with the florid speech he had acquired in his early years of working in stock companies:

"I was unknown and on a side road, picking my way through villages and hamlets. A genuine Via Dolorosa. Once a man like myself begins to slip there are kicks, bludgeons, blows."

Mr. Bushman was not seeking pity. For by then he had begun the radio and television careers that were to enable him to live in comfort.

"I have no regrets," he once said. "People look on me as a legend. It's pretty nice to be a legend and alive."

Another time, when he was asked if he wished he had saved some of his millions, he replied:

"When you have the capacity for enjoyment, that's the time to enjoy life. As you get older, you begin to think before you



Culver

Francis X. Bushman and Beverly Bayne in "The Great Secret," a 1916 movie. He was in more than 400 films.

enjoy, and that spoils everything."

Nor was Mr. Bushman embarrassed by the fact that he continued to think highly of the flamboyant style of acting that was to become known as "ham."

"Nowadays," he said not too long ago, "people say without changing expressions: 'Hello, dear, mother's dead.' In the old days we gave it lots of feeling, breast-beating and arm-waving."

Nevertheless, Mr. Bushman was able to see himself and his style in perspective. Thus, in the middle nineteen-forties, when he was being interviewed by Pete Martin for The Saturday Evening Post, he recalled seeing a re-issue of one of his movies:

"When my face flashed on the screen, I laughed so hard I cried. I said: 'Look at that. I'm putting all of my emotions in my jaw.'"

Francis Xavier Bushman was born on Jan. 10, 1883 in Baltimore. His theatrical career began with stock companies in the East and he made his Broadway debut in 1907 in "Queen of the Moulin Rouge."

Portraits Gained Attention

Countless publicity releases and gimmicks in which Mr. Bushman participated confused the chronicles of his life. There were reports that he had run away to join a circus as a boy. But there is no reason to doubt accounts that showed that his acting career was preceded, or accompanied, by work as a wrestler, a weight-lifter, a bicycle-rider and a sculptor's model.

By Mr. Bushman's own account, his posing for sculptors, more than his many months in theatrical stage companies brought him to the attention of the filmmakers.

Pictures of these poses attracted the attention of a movie scout and gained his entrance into the movie business as an actor for the Essanay Film Company, which then had studios in Camden, N. J.

His first film, "Lost Years," in 1911, attracted considerable praise, and since the two-reelers were often ground out in a couple of days, his fame grew rapidly with his subsequent films. A few years later he was with the Metro Film Company, which was later to become part of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Among Mr. Bushman's films were "When Soul Meets Soul," "The Spy's Deceit," "Blood Will Tell" and "Social Quicksand." He starred with Miss Bayne in "Under Royal Patronage," "Graustark," "Red, White and

Blue," "Romeo and Juliet" and the Mayer serial "The Great Secret."

His earnings became stupendous. And so did his appetites for the luxuries that this income could buy.

"Once in pictures," he recalled many years later, "I was on the Main Line. I raced always with abandon. There were thrills, hills, curves, ecstasy. It was glorious."

After his divorce, he made only one movie in 1919 and had no more film work until 1926, when he was the villainous Roman, Messala, in Lewis B. Mayer's silent version of "Ben-Hur," starring Ramon Novarro.

Although Mr. Bushman's performance was well received, Mr. Mayer accused the actor of trying to steal scenes from Mr. Novarro, whose career Mr. Mayer was pushing. As a result, Mr. Mayer would not give Mr. Bushman any more film roles. That and the advent of sound, which made obsolete the silent lovers that Mr. Bushman played, crushed his comeback attempt.

Mr. Bushman's fortune was wiped out by the stock market collapse of 1929 and he filed a bankruptcy petition that showed him to be more than \$100,000 in debt.

2,500 Bit Parts

In the next 20 years he appeared in few movies and in none of them did he have big roles. He played Bernard M. Baruch, the financier, in "Wilson" in 1943 and King Saul in "David and Bathsheba" in 1951.

But radio, and then television, gave him new opportunities. He was said to have had more than 2,500 bit parts in radio "soap operas" alone before he began getting television work.

Once more, large audiences began seeing his face. It was still handsome though the jaw was jowly and the thick hair was white. He was recognized more often at Hollywood premieres and it seemed there was once more a market for the man of whom Arthur Brisbane had once written:

"His is the best-known name and face in the world."

Mr. Bushman's third wife was the former Norma Atkins, who died in 1956. He is survived by his widow, whom he married in 1956; 6 children by his first and second marriages; 12 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

A funeral service will be held Friday afternoon in the Church of the Recessional, Forest Lawn, Glendale, Calif. Burial will follow in the Memorial Court of Honor at Forest Lawn.