

TBN Favorite, 'FBI' Actor Efrem Zimbalist Passes at 95

Efrem Zimbalist Jr., who portrayed the indefatigable Inspector Lewis Erskine on the long-running U.S. television series *The .*, died on Friday at the age of 95, according to media reports.

Zimbalist died at his home in Solvang, California, his daughter, actress Stephanie Zimbalist, and his son, Efrem Zimbalist III, said in a statement, Hollywood trade magazine *Variety* and other media reported.

"A devout Christian, he actively enjoyed his life to the last day, showering love on his extended family, playing golf, and visiting with close friends," the statement said, according to *Variety*.

A spokesman for the family could not be immediately reached for comment.

From the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, Zimbalist was one of the top stars on U.S. television, playing a private detective on the ABC series *77 Sunset Strip* from 1958 to 1964 before his stint on *The .* on the same network from 1965 to 1974.

Zimbalist, the son of opera singer Alma Gluck and concert violinist Efrem Zimbalist Sr., also appeared in about 20 movies—usually in supporting roles but sometimes as the leading man.

He was born on Nov. 30, 1918, in New York and saw U.S. Army combat duty during World War II.

During its nine seasons on the air, *The .* dramatized the Federal Bureau of Investigation as its agents solved murders, kidnappings and bank heists. Its episodes—inspired by real

cases—required FBI approval.

Zimbalist portrayed Erskine as an assiduous, dedicated investigator during an era when the FBI in real life was embroiled in America's tumult during the Vietnam War era.

The actor said the FBI's larger-than-life director, J. Edgar Hoover, was initially reluctant to give his permission for the series and "was not a lover of Hollywood." The two eventually met and had a steady correspondence.

In 2009, the FBI honored Zimbalist, at age 90, in a ceremony in Los Angeles in which agency Director Robert Mueller presented him with an honorary special agent badge.

Mueller said Zimbalist over the years helped the FBI by narrating recruitment commercials and taking part in fundraising events for children of agents killed in the line of duty.

"I'm a conservative Republican," Zimbalist told the *Oklahoman* newspaper in 2011. "And I wasn't a friend of the FBI just because I was in the show. My philosophy is the same. I was deeply aware of the sentiment against the bureau and against Hoover."

On *77 Sunset Strip*, a show that was more carefree than *The* , Zimbalist played wisecracking private detective Stu Bailey, starring alongside Roger Smith and Edd Byrnes.

Zimbalist appeared occasionally with his daughter, Stephanie Zimbalist, on her 1980s TV series *Remington Steele* with Pierce Brosnan, and later did voice work for animated TV shows.

His supporting movie roles included parts in *House of Strangers* (1949) with Edward G. Robinson, *Band of Angels* (1957) with Clark Gable and Sidney Poitier, *Too Much, Too Soon* (1958) with Errol Flynn, *Airport 1975* (1974) with Charlton Heston and *Hot Shots!* (1991) with Charlie Sheen.

He was sometimes a leading man, as in *Harlow* in 1965 with Carol Lynley and *The Chapman Report* in 1962 with Jane Fonda.

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