

## Studies in character

In his 40-year career, James Cromwell has created many memorable characters, including these three:



PETER SOREL Associated Press

**TOTAL FILM** ranked him the 56th-best movie villain.

### Capt. Dudley Smith

Cromwell portrayed the ruthless LAPD captain in the 1997 noir "L.A. Confidential."

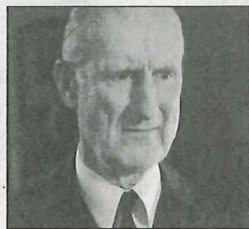


CAROLYN JONES Universal Studios

**AT 6 FEET 7**, Cromwell is the tallest Oscar nominee.

### Arthur Hoggett

Cromwell earned an Oscar nomination as a farmer who wins a piglet in 1995's "Babe."



PETER IOVINO Weinstein Co.

**HIS MOTHER**, Kay Johnson, starred in early talkies.

### Clifton

Cromwell played the loyal, concerned valet/chauffeur in 2011's "The Artist."

# Stirring it up

James Cromwell, character actor and PETA activist, is a man of many passions. He shines in 'Still Mine.'

BY SUSAN KING

Versatile character actor James Cromwell has always looked askance at authority.

"There used to be a bumper sticker that said 'resist authority,'" said Cromwell, best known for his Oscar-nominated supporting turn in 1995's "Babe" as the taciturn farmer who teaches an adorable pig to herd sheep, although he's had memorable roles in such Oscar-winning films as "L.A. Confidential" and "The Artist" and landmark TV series "All in the Family" and "Six Feet Under."

"That has sort have been my byword," said Cromwell, 73, who added that his defiant attitude often got him into trouble in school. "I find that the authoritarian part of our society that we are living in is limiting and dehumanizing. My natural reaction is to ball my fists up."

As a young stage actor during the civil rights movement, he toured burned-out churches as a member of the Free Southern Theater, worked with the Black Panthers to help get the group's leaders, including Bobby Seale, out of jail and was arrested during antiwar protests.

And he's still fighting.

A vegan and animal-rights activist working with PETA since "Babe," Cromwell was arrested this year for disrupting a University of Wisconsin Board of Regents meeting to protest experiments on cats.

Cromwell has been acting steadily in film, TV and theater for more than 40 years, but he nearly gave up his career in the early 1970s because acting "didn't seem to make any sense" anymore to him.

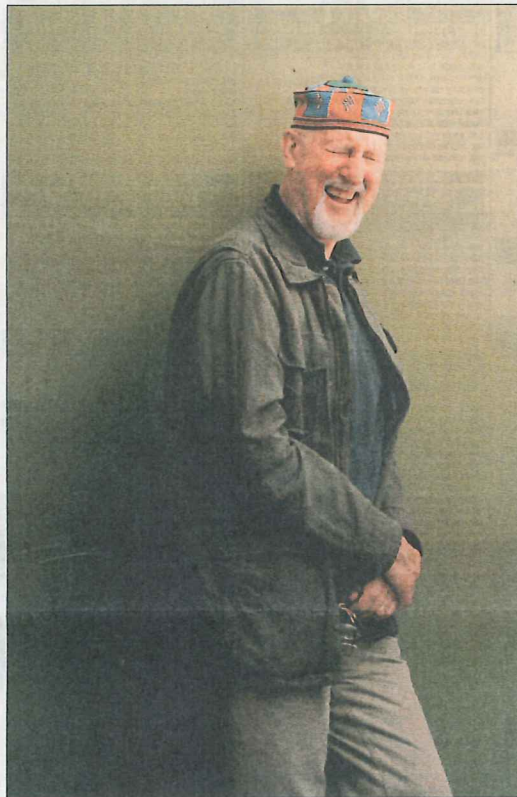
"I hitchhiked around the world in search of something," Cromwell said by phone from New York. "One day I came back to California and said, 'I won't do this anymore. I will be a probation officer.'"

But Gordon Davidson, the former artistic director of Center Theatre Group, with whom Cromwell had worked before, heard Cromwell was in town and cast him as an understudy in an opera he was directing.

"I couldn't have sung a note," said Cromwell, "but he brought me back in the theater. And I began a career."

Cromwell said he's been fortunate to play such a wide spectrum of characters, including the benevolent Arthur Hoggett in "Babe," Clifton the chauffeur and valet in "The Artist" and a ruthless LAPD captain in "L.A. Confidential."

"Character actors are the guy who doesn't get the girl," he said. But he noted that he gets to portray "characters that come across as a full human being with failings, dark spots, insecurities and courage."



JENNIFER S. ALTMAN For The Times

**THE UPSIDE** to being a character actor, James Cromwell says, is that he gets to play "a full human being with failings, dark spots."

He does get the girl in his latest film, "Still Mine," which opens Friday.

The romantic Canadian drama based on a true story casts Cromwell in a rare starring role as Craig Morrison, a Canadian farmer in his 80s whose wife, Irene (Genevieve Bujold of "Anne of the Thousand Days"), is descending rapidly into dementia. Craig realizes their rambling old two-story house is a danger to her and decides to build a smaller home. But a zealous government bureaucrat has other ideas.

The film, said Cromwell, has done well in Canada because "whereas 'Amour,' which is an extraordinary film, shows the darker side of [growing old], our film tends to show it in a loving, compassionate and easy way. For the most part, her transition out of their lives and into dementia was a gentle one, in which they got to complete their relationship."

Writer-director Michael McGowan said that Cromwell, whose father was blacklisted film director John Cromwell ("The Prisoner of

Zenda"), was "not trying to prove himself. From our first script discussion right through the film, his only interest was making the best film possible."

One of the most poignant moments in "Still Mine" finds Craig and Irene tenderly taking their clothes off and embracing before they make love.

"I had a crush on Genevieve when I was in college," admitted Cromwell.

"Still Mine" doesn't mark his first nude screen debut. "I did another nude scene in film called 'Tank' and have done several on stage—even in my production of 'Hamlet,'" he said, laughing. "I will take my clothes off at the drop of a hat."

Cromwell will soon head to Chicago to begin filming the new ABC drama series "Betrayal."

"The producer sold it to me on the idea that the character was a Lear-like character," Cromwell said. "I am always a sucker when I get a chance to do Lear."

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# 'Ranger' flops at box office

[Box office, from D1] summer box office. Walt Disney Studios had to halt production on "The Lone Ranger" in 2011 when the movie's budget soared to \$250 million; the studio says it eventually reduced the cost to \$225 million. Other summer films with budgets of \$200 million or more, including "World War Z" and "Man of Steel," got off to far better starts at the box office. Last month, Brad Pitt's zombie flick debuted with \$66.4 million, while the Superman reboot opened with \$116.6 million. The \$294 million three-day take for "The Lone Ranger" is an embarrassment for the studio.

"Despicable Me 2," meanwhile, was made on the cheaper side for an animated family film. While most movies in the genre have budgets of at least \$100 million, Universal and its Illumination Entertainment produced the "Despicable" sequel for \$76 million. Although the second film received slightly less positive reviews than the 2010 original, audiences gave both films the same average grade—an A, according to market research firm CinemaScore.

Three years ago, "Despicable Me" launched with a surprisingly strong \$56.4 million and went on to collect \$251.5 million in the U.S. and Canada—about 46% of its eventual \$543-million global tally.

The movie follows newly reformed super-villain Gru (Steve Carell) as he is recruited by an Anti-Villain League to help catch an evil new foe. A spinoff featuring the movie's yellow, blob-like characters, the Minions, is already set for release during Christmas 2014.

"Despicable Me 2" launched in a few foreign markets last weekend and is playing in 45 countries and has grossed \$151.1 million. Of the 38 markets where the film debuted abroad, it was No. 1 in 36 of them. In Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa, Trinidad and Vietnam, "Despicable Me 2" had the strongest opening ever for an animated title.

It's unlikely "The Lone Ranger" will be able to make up ground internationally. Even though Depp has long been a draw for foreign moviegoers, westerns tradi-

tionally do not attract big audiences abroad. This past weekend, the film opened in 24 foreign markets, including Russia and Australia, and grossed \$24.3 million.

After earning dismal reviews, "The Lone Ranger"—produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and directed by long-time Depp collaborator Gore Verbinski—received a kinder reception from filmgoers. The audience that saw the movie gave it an average grade of B+. The film appealed to an older audience, as about 68% of the crowd was 25 or older, and 24% was 50 or older—indicating that those who saw it were likely familiar with the 1950s "Lone Ranger" television series.

"The heritage and the legacy of the characters, while super-familiar to people of a certain age, was not as familiar to a young audience," said Dave Hollis, Disney's executive vice president of distribution.

Admitting the studio was "disappointed" with the film's lackluster performance, Hollis cited a number of factors that may have contributed. That the picture is a western—often a tough sell with modern moviegoers—was "always going to be a bit of an overcome," he said. The bad buzz generated from the film's production troubles didn't help either, he admitted.

"It feels like there's been some circling sharks in the water around productions that haven't been perfect," he said.

The only other movie to hit theaters nationwide this past week was "Kevin Hart: Let Me Explain," a stand-up comedy flick Hart filmed during a sold-out performance at Madison Square Garden last year. The picture debuted in 876 theaters at 10 p.m. Tuesday and went on to gross \$17.5 million by weekend's end. That's an exceptional start for a movie in so few theaters that cost just \$2.5 million to produce—money that Hart put up himself.

"This really shows the power of Kevin Hart and how he is the hottest comic talent in the urban space today," said David Spitz, Lionsgate's general sales manager.

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PETER MOUNTAIN Disney

**JOHNNY DEPP** as Tonto and Armie Hammer as "The Lone Ranger" stumbled over the Fourth of July.

## BOX OFFICE

Estimated sales in the U.S. and Canada:

Movie (Studio)	3-day gross (millions) last weekend	Percentage change from weekend	Total (millions)	Days in release
1 Despicable Me 2 (Universal/Illumination)	\$82.5	NA	\$142.1	5*
2 The Lone Ranger (Disney)	\$29.4	NA	\$48.9	5*
3 The Heat (Fox)	\$25	-36%	\$86.4	10