

In Memoriam

by

Dennis May, Adult Services Coordinator

There has never been two more iconic voices and personalities to grace the screen and stage than James Earl Jones and Maggie Smith. This past September the world had to say goodbye to them both. My love and admiration for Maggie Smith didn't develop until after I graduated from college and Brenna, my then-girlfriend-now-wife, practically forced me to read Harry Potter before I could watch the movies. I devoured the novels. Then I devoured the movies and was mesmerized by Smith's portrayal of Professor McGonagall's sharp wit and wisdom. However, it was her portrayal of Dowager Countess Violet Grantham in *Downton Abbey* that truly made me fall in love. I wanted Smith's presence in every scene, challenging the other characters' egos and delivering witty and biting retorts.

Although I found Maggie Smith as an adult, my love and admiration for James Earl Jones developed earlier in my life. As a kid, I sat in awe watching the terrifying Darth Vader and being absolutely mesmerized by the cadence of his voice. When I watched *The Lion King* for the first time, I knew I had heard Mufasa's voice before, but I couldn't place it because Mufasa was a warm and gentle soul while Darth Vader was terrifying. That's how good James Earl Jones was; same voice but vastly different characters. Watching *Field of Dreams* just solidified my fandom. Every time I think about his "They Will Come" speech, I get chills.

Even though two of my favorite actors are gone now, they have given us a wonderful gift: we can visit them any time through their iconic roles in movies and television.

In 2007, James Earl Jones lent his voice to a little documentary called *Earth*. The film follows three species: the polar bear, African bush elephant, and the humpback whale. The audience joins these animals as they navigate the changing of the seasons and climate change. The documentary conveys an important message of conservation and caring for our planet. Jones's voice grips and captivates his audience, both young and old, as he details the animals' journey. In our collection we also have *The Lion King*, Star Wars movies, including his final performance as Darth Vader in *Rogue One*.

Maggie Smith's final film released before her passing was *The Miracle Club* (2023). This movie follows a group of close friends and their pilgrimage to the sacred French town of Lourdes. It's a beautiful story of hope, faith, and reconciliation, and Smith's performance and chemistry with Kathy Bates is worth a viewing. If you want to know more about Maggie Smith's legacy, I would also recommend checking out her 2017 biography (*Maggie Smith: A Biography*) written by Michael Coveney. Coveney incorporates a mixture of Smith's personal stories and interviews and testimonials from immediate family and closest friends to capture her essence: one of the greatest actresses of both stage and screen.

James Earl Jones and Maggie Smith shaped key projects in movies, television, and theater for the cumulative 14 decades of their professional acting careers. We will miss them always, but you can stop by the Kirkland Town Library to check out their bodies of work any time.