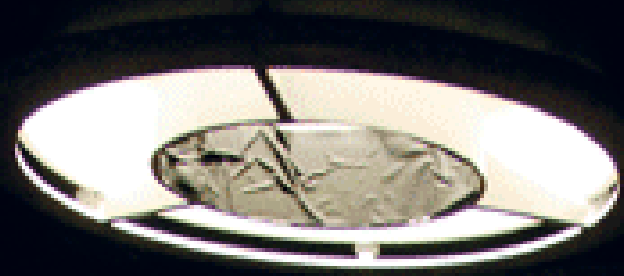
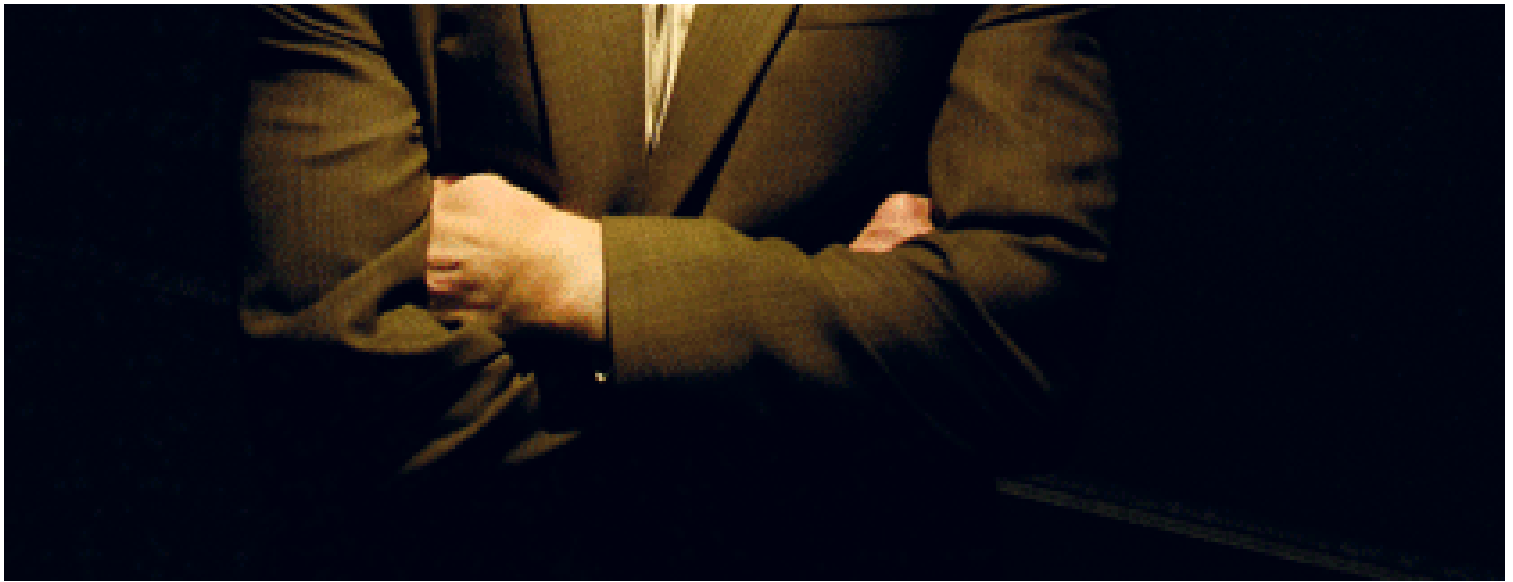


Persona: David Morse

12/30/2010 by [Sue Strachan \(https://www.myneworleans.com/author/sue-strachan/\)](https://www.myneworleans.com/author/sue-strachan/)





AP Photo/Chris Pizzello PHOTOGRAPH

For an actor who has been in 60 movies, 17 TV shows, and a number of productions on stage (I'm guessing more than 60), David Morse is obviously in demand. He has acted with Jack Nicholson, Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, Meg Ryan and Bjork; has been directed by Sean Penn, Frank Darabont, Lars von Trier and Taylor Hackford; and has written for TV shows, including "Hack," the show he starred in 2002-'04. Morse has even tested his vocal chords a bit in *Dancer in the Dark*. Then there's the countless YouTube clips, movies, TV shows, interviews and some fan tributes, which range from amusing to strange.

So, I asked my friends, "Who's your David Morse?" For some, he's the character in *The Green Mile*; for others, it's the "I know he's played a lot of bad guys," (cue his roles in *Disturbia* and *Dancer in the Dark*). I reference Dr. Jack 'Boomer' Morrison, on "St. Elsewhere." I remember having a huge crush on him and wondering, "Why, oh why do all these bad things happen to him?" (I also believe it launched a thousand men subsequently being nicknamed Boomer.) So I have to say when I met him for the first time at a party, I was like the giddy schoolgirl with a crush. (I babbled a lot.) My first impression: Reserved, smart and interesting. I learned Morse participated in Vietnam War peace marches in 1967 and that, like many a New Orleanian who has a dog, he was having a hard time finding a place to live that would allow pets.

Morse is familiar with and a fan of New Orleans. He hasn't done Mardi Gras, but he has been here for roles (including in *Crazy in Alabama*) and is currently taking residence for "Treme" as Lt. Terry Colson of the New Orleans Police Department. He was in two episodes in Season One, though one doesn't get a sense of where his character may be going in Season Two.

Ah, the mystery. I guess we're just going to have to tune in to find out what David Morse we will see. Season Two of "Treme" will premiere in April 2011.

Age: 57 **Born:** Beverly, Mass. **Family:** Wife, Susan Wheeler Duff; three children; one rescued greyhound. **Education:** Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School; William Esper Studio. I was the youngest member of the Boston Repertory Theatre. **Favorite book:** I think it depends on what time it is in your life. When I was younger, even though I liked Lord of the Rings and all that, C.S. Lewis' The Space Trilogy was my favorite. Now, Peace Like a River by Leigh Eger and A Soldier of the Great War by Mark Helprin. **Favorite movie:** Fanny and Alexander. But I must give my friend Sean Penn a tip of the hat for Into the Wild. And part of what I like about it is that Sean stuck with that for 12 years, talking to the family; it's a true story. When the book first came out, a lot of people wanted to make it. But he took such care with the family; they believed in him. I also like how he told the story. And Emile Hirsch, he didn't get recognized the way he should have. What he had to go through over the nine months or so it took to make the film ... I was proud of everyone who worked on that film and the care they took with the story. What is your favorite movie you've been in? The Green Mile. It's an amazing movie, and another movie where everyone did such great work and was a great ensemble. So many people talk to me about it like it's A Wonderful Life; it's enduring. **Favorite music:** I know Roseanne Cash a little bit, and I like her album, The List.

When she was about 18, 19 years old, she asked her father Johnny Cash what songs she should learn, and he wrote out a list. I got it for my birthday last year, and a year later, when I get in my car, I'll listen to it. Favorite TV Show: "Man from U.N.C.L.E." I wanted to get my hair cut like David McCallum and I took his picture from a magazine to the barber and asked him to cut my hair that way. The barber told everyone. I never lived it down. Favorite food: Pizza, but I can't have it. Hobby: I've never had a hobby in my life, but there are things I like to do – writing, art and creating. Favorite vacation spot: Maine

His early years of acting: You said you were one of the youngest members of the Boston Repertory Theatre. I was by far the youngest at the theatre. I literally hadn't graduated from high school.

What high school roles did you play? The play that got me the audition [at Boston Rep] was Zoo Story by Edward Albee.

But the other notable role, but not for the right reason, was a production of Our Town. I had been doing so poorly in school – [theater] was all I wanted to do – that I had been taken out of plays because of my grades. The woman, who I adored, who was in charge of the production, told me before the production that she wanted me to play the "Stage Manager," but was afraid to cast me because my grades might hold up the play. So she cast me in a smaller role, and I had to watch my best friend in the role.

Years later, my twin sons did a production of *Our Town*, and one of them played the “Stage Manager,” so I got to live vicariously through them. It was a great high school production. I still have not been the “Stage Manager,” though I adore the role.

Morse as an actor: How much research do you do for a role? I put in as much as I’m allowed. With some movies, I get three days notice. One of the movies we did down here, *Crazy in Alabama*, I literally found out on a Thursday, started shooting on Monday and I had to learn an Alabama accent over the weekend.

For George Washington (in “*John Adams*”), I had heard for a year-and-a-half that they might offer me the role, and I wanted to start doing research, but I knew the moment I started they wouldn’t offer me the role. I put it off.

Finally they were getting close to shooting, and I kept on hearing that I was going to be offered it, so felt I had to start. The moment I started, they offered the role to two other people – who wound up not doing it. I was then doing a film in Canada, and two weeks before shooting they offered the role to me; so I had only two weeks to prepare, when I could have had a year.

What have been your most challenging roles? They are challenging for different reasons.

When I was with the Boston Rep, there was a play *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* and I was cast as Thoreau when I was 19 – too young. It was challenging in the way that I was too young, and one of the reviews was, “Hopefully this actor will never be on the stage again” – that kind of review. But I had to keep on doing the role and get better as I did it.

The movie, *Proof of Life*. It was three-and-a-half months in Ecuador. Physically the toll it took, the danger, people getting killed – my stand-in was killed – the military protecting us everywhere we went, the environment we were shooting in every single day. [Director] Taylor Hackford wanted to really challenge his crew with the environment and everything. No doubt about it, he challenged his crew. [But,] the experience of it, I loved it and loved being in Ecuador and its people, but it was rough on everybody.

Is there an actor that you haven’t worked with that you would like to? I would love to act with Sean Penn. He’s directed me in two movies [*The Indian Runner* and *The Crossing Guard*]. He’s a friend and I hope to work with him.

I read that your voice is the one people hear at Walt Disney World for the animatronic George Washington. [Morse played him in the TV miniseries “*John Adams*.”] **Have you seen or heard it?** Yes, I did it. I can’t believe they used it. We were in Florida with the kids, and we

thought of going over and sneaking in. [But,] I would be so embarrassed. I don't want to hear George Washington sounding like me. I want to hear him sounding like we all think he should sound like.

About "Treme" and New Orleans: I know you can't tell me, but do you have any idea how your character, Lt. Terry Colson, is going to develop? No. Melissa [Leo] and I feel the same way; we really don't want to know what's coming. It's a lot like life; you experience it when you get there.

When I started playing this character last year, there was very little information about him. So I'm going on faith in many ways.

What are you looking forward to in New Orleans? Before Hurricane Katrina, I had done a couple movies down here and I had been here just enough to get a little feeling for the city. I just look forward to being part of the city, actually.

I think it's an amazing city and an amazing part of the world. Obviously, it's a place with the major problems of any city, but it feels so much smaller, everyone seems to know each other – there's a feeling like you are really part of a community here.

If you weren't an actor, what would you do? I love writing. I love the act of writing. I'm interested in writing everything.

I'm writing a novel. One of the characters – and this is before "Treme" happened – he escapes to New Orleans. I didn't know enough about New Orleans and I thought I was going to have to come down here, spend time in the city and learn about the city. Literally in weeks, they asked if I would do "Treme." Now I really get to learn the city.

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