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celeb bio

Olympia Dukakis

Riding high in her golden years

By **Jacqueline Spendlove**
TV Media

The majestically-named Olympia Dukakis has a long and respected career behind her, but it wasn't until she was well into her 50s that she became a household name. That was thanks to "Moonstruck," the 1987 romcom starring Cher and Nicolas Cage. Dukakis played the delightfully acerbic mother of Cher's lead character, Italian-American widow Loretta Castorini, and

took home the Academy Award and the Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress for her performance. The daughter of Greek immigrants, Dukakis graduated from Boston University with a degree in physical therapy, which would serve her well during the polio epidemic in the '50s. She later returned to BU to earn her Master of Fine Arts. Though Dukakis was little known among the movie-going crowd before hitting the silver screen in "Moonstruck," she had been making a

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name for herself on the stage for nearly 30 years. She appeared in Off-Broadway productions of Anton Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard," Bertolt Brecht's "Man Equals Man" and many more, and has proven herself a prolific theatrical director to boot. It was

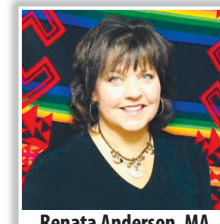
her scene-stealing performance in "Social Security" on Broadway in 1986 that caught director Norman Jewison's eye, which led to her being cast in "Moonstruck" and making her way into the hearts of the masses. Though she had had a few smaller screen

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roles before "Moonstruck," it was that film that really propelled her into a new chapter of her career, and at an age where many actresses find the work starting to dry up. A consummate mother character who can pull off a number of ethnicities, Dukakis went on to appear in many major films with big-name casts, such as "Steel Magnolias" (1989), "Look Who's Talking" (1989) and its sequels, "The Mighty Aphrodite" (1995) and "Mr. Holland's Opus" (1995), among many others. Nor has her career slowed down in her golden years — Dukakis has appeared in 10 films in the past decade, along with a slew of television roles. She was lauded for her portrayal of Anna Madrigal, the transgendered landlady in the acclaimed 1993 PBS miniseries "Tales of the City," based on the series of novels by Armistead Maupin. She reprised the role in two sequels, miniseries in 1998 and 2001, respectively, along with co-stars Laura Linney, Paul Gross and Barbara Garrick. You can watch her now in all her glory in the latest installment, "Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City," which premieres Friday, June 7, on Netflix.

FACTS:

- Born June 20, 1931, in Lowell, Massachusetts (age 87)
- Excelled at fencing in high school
- Her "Moonstruck" Oscar was stolen from her house in 1989 (she bought a replacement from the Academy for \$78)
- Has taught acting at universities around the world
- Her cousin is Michael Dukakis, former governor of Massachusetts and the 1988 Democratic presidential nominee
- Was married to actor Louis Zorich ("Mad About You") for 56 years, until his death in 2018
- She and Zorich founded the Whole Theatre Company in Montclair, New Jersey, and ran it together for 19 years

QUOTES:

"Most of us are not real eager to grow, myself included. We try to be happy by staying in the status quo. But if we're not willing to be honest with ourselves about what we feel, we don't evolve."

"Winning is everything in Hollywood."



Olympia Dukakis in "Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City"