

Beat: Vips

Body of Sopranos star Gandolfini arrives in U.S.

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USPA News - The body of American actor James Gandolfini, who died of a suspected heart attack last week while vacationing in the Italian capital of Rome, was returned to the United States on late Sunday evening. His funeral is expected to be held on Thursday.

Gandolfini's body left Italy at around 6 p.m. local time (1600 GMT) on Sunday when a private Signature Airlines flight departed from Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport in Rome. The aircraft landed at Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey at around 9 p.m. local time (0100 GMT Monday). Earlier on Sunday, Gandolfini family spokesman Michael Kobold thanked Italian authorities for speeding up standard formalities to repatriate the actor's remains to the United States. "We are fully aware that this process usually takes 7 days and we are extremely grateful for their efficiency in dealing with this matter," he said. Gandolfini's body was transported from Newark Liberty International Airport at around 11:20 p.m. local time to an undisclosed location, believed to be a funeral home. The actor's funeral is scheduled to be held on Thursday at 10 a.m. at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in Manhattan. Gandolfini, who won three Emmy Awards for his portrayal of a conflicted New Jersey mob boss in the popular HBO cable television series "The Sopranos," collapsed in the bathroom of his hotel room in Rome just after 10 p.m. local time on June 19. His 13-year-old son, Michael, discovered him and called for help, but the actor was later pronounced dead at Policlinico Umberto I hospital. Gandolfini, who was 51, is believed to have died of a heart attack. HBO, which is expected to air a brief tribute to Gandolfini after future airings of "The Sopranos," said last week it was "feeling immeasurable sadness" at the actor's sudden death. "He was a special man, a great talent, but more importantly a gentle and loving person who treated everyone no matter their title or position with equal respect," the network said in a statement. The series' creator, David Chase, also paid tribute on Thursday. "He was a genius. Anyone who saw him even in the smallest of his performances knows that. He is one of the greatest actors of this or any time," he wrote in an emotional statement. "He wasn't easy sometimes. But he was my partner, he was my brother in ways I can't explain and never will be able to explain." In "The Sopranos," Gandolfini portrayed Tony Soprano who heads the most powerful criminal organization in New Jersey. The series, which ran six seasons between January 1999 and June 2007, revolves around the mobster's life as he tries to balance the conflicting requirements of his personal life and the criminal organization he heads.

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