



Mr. Robert M. Boland

September 20, 1925 - April 25, 2016

Robert M. Boland passed away Monday at his home, he was born September 20, 1925 in Philadelphia, PA, the son of the late Paul T. and Eva H. Boland. Subsequently, the family moved to Joplin, Missouri where he received his early schooling. In 1939, the family moved to Pittsfield, MA.

Boland graduated from Pittsfield High School in the Class of 1944, but had been drafted into military service in November, 1943. He was trained as a radar navigator in the (then) Army Air Force and served for 2-1/2 years overseas as an Adjunct to the U.S. Navy on board "Liberty" ships. He was discharged in 1946.

In 1948, Bob enrolled at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1952. While a student there, he was actively involved in the Roister Doisters Dramatic Society and the Operetta Guild in the Music Department. As a result of his activities, Bob was elected "Man of the Year" in 1952. He had designed and choreographed numerous theatrical productions including Brigadoon, The

Student Prince,
South Pacific, Carousel, East of Eden, and Liliom.

During this period, Bob somehow found the time to write the “book” and lyrics for an original musical production titled Thunder in the Hills. This work was finally performed in 1958 and included in the cast was Buffy Saint-Marie, who was a student at that time.

The Rodgers & Hammerstein organization was reluctant to authorize a student production of Carousel. Bob had already produced color renderings of his concepts for the settings and Dr. Doric Alviani, Director of the Operetta Guild, took these to New York City to show them. They were so impressed with Bob’s work that they agreed to authorize the first student production of their beloved musical!

Following graduation, Bob received a Fellowship to the Theatre Department at Smith College for 1953-54. During that time, he also worked for the ANTA Theatre Project at the Court Square Theatre in Springfield, MA.

In 1954, he was awarded a scholarship to the first professional theatre program at Boston University, and was one of only twenty-five students selected for that honor.

He graduated with a Masters of Fine Arts degree in 1955.

While at Boston University, Bob worked for the Tracy Music Library in Boston where he designed production books for Gilbert & Sullivan operettas. During this time, he also had the honor of designing settings and costumes for noted opera director, Sarah Caldwell.

Following this, Bob returned to Pittsfield and was appointed to the Art Department of the Pittsfield Public School system. In 1957, he was named Supervisor of Art for the Pittsfield secondary schools, succeeding the man who had been his own art instructor in the school system, Thomas R. Curtin.

Then, in 1961, he joined the faculty of the newly-formed Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield (on Second Street). This was the first community college to begin operations in Massachusetts, and Bob and the late Clara Park of Williamstown were the first faculty members to be hired.

Bob remained at BCC, becoming Chairman of the Theatre and Fine Arts Department, until his retirement in 1988. During this period, he directed more than sixty theatrical productions while also teaching Art History, Theatre, Speech and Music courses. He

actually had created both the Visual Arts and Theatre majors at BCC.

Bob's fondest theatrical memory, however, was of the spectacular outdoor production of Oklahoma which he directed and which was staged at Wahconah Park in 1961 as part of the celebration of the Pittsfield bi-centennial. In fact, Bob and the late Philip Ahern had been named co-chairmen of the bi-centennial festivities. His staging of this musical was the undisputed highlight of the entire celebration.

Bob was a Life member of the Town Players of Pittsfield amateur theatrical group.

He had introduced music theatre to the Berkshires with productions of Brigadoon and Annie, Get Your Gun at Pittsfield High School. He then directed (and designed) for the Town Players productions of Kiss Me Kate, Carousel, Anything Goes, A Little Night Music, and Into The Woods, as well as numerous other productions.

Bob directed a production of "1776" which was the first theatrical production in the new theatre on BCC's new campus on outer West Street in 1973. At his retirement, the theatre was formally named the Robert M. Boland Theatre. In fact, Bob had a great deal of involvement in the design of the theatre facility itself and his expertise in that regard is primarily responsible for the theatre's continued successful use today.

Over the years, Bob served on the Board of Directors for such organizations as the Town Players, Jacobs Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, the Berkshire Museum, the Pittsfield Music School, the Berkshire Ballet (now Albany Berkshire Ballet), and the Berkshire County Savings Bank (now Berkshire Bank).

As a longtime member of St. Stephen's Parish in Pittsfield, Bob was remembered for his contributions in decorations (especially a Nativity scene at Christmas) and, most notably, his several productions of the Boar's Head Pageant during Epiphany.

Among the many awards Bob has received are included the President's Award from then BCC President Jonathan Daube in 1983 and the Berkshire County Historical Society's Preservation award in 2007. Also, in 1998, he was honored with an evening of entertainment by the Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire County.

In 1985, Bob was asked to be Grand Marshall of the annual Pittsfield Fourth of July parade along with his former student, Kathy Larkin who, by then, had become an accomplished professional actress.

In 1997, Bob co-authored a book, with his longtime friend Paul Argentini, which is titled

Musicals! Directing School and Community Theatre. In the forward, esteemed Berkshires playwright William Gibson said that the book “in my opinion, should be in every high school and college library in the country”.

A great many of Bob’s former students have gone on to successful careers in the worlds of theatre and art, and all credit Bob as the source of their original aspirations. He was constantly recognized in supermarkets, etc. during his later years by former students still residing in the Pittsfield area. In fact, he even once was recognized by a former student while lunching in a pub in London, England!

During the late 1990’s, Bob was the single significant instigator for the effort to save the Colonial Theatre on South Street in Pittsfield. As with previous efforts on his part in this regard decades before, he found it difficult to interest local politicians and businessmen in this endeavor. Consequently, Bob formed a volunteer group called the Friends of the Colonial Theatre Restoration to promote his dream. He conducted hundreds of free tours of the building while it was still the home of Miller’s Art Supply and, eventually, turned public opinion overwhelmingly in favor of the restoration concept. If not for Bob’s efforts,

the successfully restored Colonial Theatre of today would not exist.

Since 1975, Bob resided at 113 East Housatonic Street in Pittsfield with his long-time companion, Thomas J. Blalock. In his later years, he enjoyed gardening, oil painting, and painting restoration.

Bob is survived by his sister, Mary Ellen Ames, of Palm Desert, CA, as well as three nephews. Kevin Ames resides with his husband, Mike Langham, in nearby Palm Springs; David Ames resides in San Francisco; and Stephen Ames resides in Menlo Park, CA with his wife Robin and their children, Emerson and Ellery. He also has a niece, Christine Albertus, living with her daughter, Kari Brodzinski, in Newark, Delaware.

Bob was predeceased by a brother, Paul, a U.S. Marine Corps pilot who was lost at sea during World War II in 1944. Also, a brother, Maurice ("Bud"), a retired U.S. Air Force pilot, in 1999, as well as his wife, Janet. Finally, most distressingly, his brother-in-law, Robert Ames, formerly of Palm Desert, CA.

FUNERAL NOTICE- A memorial service for Mr. Robert M. Boland will be held at St. Stephens Episcopal Church at a time and date to be announced. Donations in his memory may be made to the Colonial Theatre or the BCC Foundation Scholarship Fund, in care of the WELLINGTON FUNERAL HOME, 220 East St., Pittsfield, MA 01201. Please visit www.wellingtonfuneralhome.com to leave condolences for his family.

Tribute Wall

RR

“ *What a great man, who actually cared for people in his life and showed kindness to all. Our prayers go out to Bob’s family and to all who are gathering for theater performances along with my mom Ruth Rice on the Golden pathways of Heaven!! You are missed!!*

Rob Rice - May 08, 2023 at 11:46 PM

CO

“ *My condolences to you, Tom, and to Bob's family. He was a wonderful man. Talented, generous, educated and intelligent. We could always use more like him and he will be sorely missed. He reminds me of the old sobriquet "a gentleman and a scholar". I send all my best to you and wish I could attend on Sunday but I have a lecture -- which I would skip -- were I not the lecturer. Sincerely
Carole Owens*

carole owens - June 22, 2016 at 10:30 AM

RN

“ *It is with great sadness and remembrance I heard of Bob's passing. A wonderful teacher, mentor. What a gift he was to so many! He taught me everything about the arts- the classics, art history- his descriptive lectures about the Renaissance could make you feel as if you were there! & Theatre -design- I can still remember parts of his lectures now, from back in the 80's. We shall all miss him, and he will certainly be remembered with love. Rebecca Namislo*

rebecca namislo - April 29, 2016 at 10:22 PM



“ Goodbye Bob, your spirit soars with the angels even as you have uplifted us who are left behind. You were the quintessential gentleman and teacher. Thanks for being so gentle with me, a young bass player new to theater in 1973. Somehow with your tolerance I made it through the production. I had the time of my life, and the score of Brigadoon will always remind me of peace, love and beauty. Thanks for that.

Ronald K. Baker

Dalton, MA

Ronald Baker - April 29, 2016 at 02:03 PM



“ Heartfelt condolences to Bob's family and loved ones. He was my teacher at the first BCC, and became a mentor and friend during a turbulent time in my life while his theater student. I will always be grateful for his kindness and support. He was a creative genius who touched so many on so many levels, and his spirit and inspiration will live on through his outstanding accomplishments here in the Berkshires. RIP, Bob.

Arlene Murdock - April 29, 2016 at 08:52 AM

DC

“ My deepest condolences go out to Bob's family and friends as we remember his generosity of spirit and his love of learning. I met Bob nearly 50 years ago when, as a high school student, I wandered into a lecture he was giving at BCC on Second St. on the subject of ancient myths. Bob's presentation was so fascinating that soon I came back for a second and a third. He noticed my interest and asked if I would help backstage with the musical that he was directing. I was hooked. I cannot name any other individual who has so often and richly contributed to my path through life and career. . As a theatre student at BCC, my long association with Jacob's Pillow and the opportunities in the dance world that engendered, to our collaboration on his dream to restore the Colonial Theatre, he had a deep, encouraging and special influence. The last time we visited, I found him reading a book on the present state of Broadway theatre and we shared our thoughts and experiences. His stories, just as those so many years ago, continued to fascinate. His special light continues to shine in our hearts.

David Chapman - April 29, 2016 at 06:13 AM

TD

“ Dear Maryellen, Kevin, David and Steven - how sorry I was to hear the sad news of your dear brother/uncle/friend. Such a talented man - and tho I didn't know him well, he was always so kind, gracious and friendly. I am sure you have so many wonderful memories of times spent together - may they eventually put a smile on your faces as the pain of his loss lessens. Sending you love and hugs.
Tanya

Tanya DeFrancesco - April 28, 2016 at 03:31 PM

JB

“ My sympathy to the family of Mr. Bob Boland. I was a student of his in the early '70's at BCC. I had the privilege of being in several shows directed by him, both at the old campus at the Common and the current one on West St. He was a wonderful man and a talented one; full of energy, fairness and kindness to name but a few items. He was a perfectionist who was always appreciative of a job well done, offstage, backstage and onstage. He had a remarkable ability to fix everything -- or so it seemed. When directing he could get on stage and play every part. I am so thankful to have known him and to have this memory.

Julie MacDonald Baker - April 28, 2016 at 03:03 PM

JA

“ Sadness becomes a part of our lives when we lose someone that left a mark on our lives but we are certainly grateful that Bob was a part of our existence . RIP.

Joyce Armstrong



Joyce Armstrong - April 28, 2016 at 11:37 AM

WL

“ RIP dear friend, mentor, director and all around wonderful human being. You will be so missed by so many. I hope you know how much you mean to all of us, how much you are loved and how much you have given us. Love and prayers to Tom & your family. Looking forward to seeing you again some day and doing it all over again!! God bless, rest easy.

Wanda Libardi - April 28, 2016 at 09:02 AM