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**Remembering a Music Hall Visionary**

Jan 18, 2008

Berthold F. Ringeisen, PhD, a founding board member of "The Friends of The Mozartina" — the not-for-profit organization that owns and operates the Tarrytown Music Hall — passed away from cancer on December 30, 2007 at the age of 75.



Dr. Ringeisen and his wife, Helen, were the driving forces behind the last-minute rescue of the Music Hall from the wrecking ball in 1980. Living a peaceful existence, their lives were forever changed when Berthold learned of the Music Hall's imminent demolition and realized that the community stood to lose one of its greatest historic and cultural institutions. Berthold and Helen risked everything, placing their home, business, and life savings up as collateral so that the theater could be saved. Stephen Byelick, a person who could be mistaken for George Bailey in the film "It's A Wonderful Life," was the only banker who would agree to finance the purchase and renovation of the Music Hall.

The theater came with several years of back taxes and deferred maintenance. The building had no heat or electricity and water was raining in, buckets at a time. As the Ringeisens had no cash, they rolled up their sleeves and did most of the work themselves, from floor sanding and painting to grant writing and event scheduling. For the next twenty-three years, they shouldered all administrative, facilities management, marketing, and custodial responsibilities on a volunteer basis while balancing the demands of full time jobs and the parenting a young child. Their volunteerism continued after an Executive Director was hired in 2003.

Back in the late 70's, there were several individuals and organizations that expressed interest in saving the theater, but they all came to the same conclusion: it could not be done. By any realistic financial assessment, they were absolutely right. Only the inspired volunteer spirit and remarkable follow-through of Berthold and Helen made it possible, against all odds. Today, the 80,000 patrons who visit the Music Hall every year do so thanks to their selfless efforts. Very few individuals have been more instrumental in transforming Tarrytown's Main Street into the busy shopping and restaurant district we know today.

Berthold grew up on a small family farm in the village of Klepsau, Germany during the dark 30's and the ensuing cataclysmic war. His schooling was interrupted, but he still made it a point to study at home, using a flashlight under the blankets. After the war, he biked eleven miles to the nearest school, and soon after left the farm to enroll in the University of Heidelberg as the first academic of his family. Seeking adventure and opportunities beyond the offerings of his war-ravaged country, he accepted a Fulbright Travel Grant and a full scholarship to Yale University in New Haven, CT where he graduated in 1957.

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He met his future wife, Helen, a young piano student from Amarillo, Texas, while he was a teacher at the University of Colorado and a love affair spanning almost half a century ensued. They settled in Tarrytown and Berthold took on a teaching position at Hackley School. He later moved up the street to Marymount College where he taught for 45 years and left as Professor Emeritus when it closed in 2007.

He continued his studies at New York University and Columbia and his hunger for learning remained strong throughout his life. He was fluent in Latin and at least seven modern languages: English, French, German, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish and taught all of them except Mandarin, as there was no opportunity to do so. He was an expert in several medieval languages such as Anglo-Saxon, Old Spanish and Vulgar Latin. A firm believer in the interdependence of mind and body, he acquired a physical education degree in addition to those in languages and literature, and taught sports, soccer and swimming. He was also proficient in the oboe, trumpet, and zither.

In the mid 70's, he spotted a run-down mansion on Prospect Avenue and convinced his wife to start The Mozartina Conservatory, the first music and dance school in Tarrytown. Together, they renovated the main house and old carriage house. The school remains open to this day and Helen still teaches the piano.

Berthold and Helen traveled the world extensively throughout Western Europe and incredibly, through the Soviet Union during the 60's in their Volkswagen van. In recent years, Berthold visited Japan and made several trips to China, stopping in such places as Tibet, Shanghai and Beijing and experiencing a Yangtze River cruise with Helen.

He is survived by his wife, Helen, and his daughter, Karina.

A memorial celebration will take place on Sunday, January 27 at 6pm at The Tarrytown Music Hall. Please RSVP to [info@tarrytownmusichall.org](mailto:info@tarrytownmusichall.org). In lieu of flowers, please consider a tax-deductible donation to the Tarrytown Music Hall: [www.tarrytownmusichall.org](http://www.tarrytownmusichall.org).

A small staff and team of dedicated volunteers continue Berthold's work at the Music Hall, operating and preserving Westchester's oldest theater.

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