



John Anthony Bridges

May 20, 1927 - November 22, 2015

John Anthony Bridges, born May 20, 1927, in Asheville, died November 22, 2015 at Givens Health Care Center. He was the only child of the late Carl Calvin Bridges and Nancy Belzora Chrisman Bridges.

John graduated from Lee Edwards High School in 1943 and then attended Asheville-Biltmore College (now UNC Asheville) for two years. Stricken by polio in 1944, he was successfully treated at home by an aunt, a former U. S. Army nurse; he then enrolled at UNC Chapel Hill, where he joined the Carolina Players and Phi Mu Alpha, the nation's oldest music-oriented fraternity. Following graduation in 1947, he spent a year in Alaska with his parents, where he directed plays for a nascent community theater group. He returned to Chapel Hill to earn an MA in Theater in 1949, where he later earned an MA in Library Science.

In 1951 John moved to New York and became manager of the Steinway Concert Hall; while there he also performed as a soloist in many churches. Following the death of his father in 1956, he returned to Asheville; for the next 29 years he was on the staff of the Buncombe County Library, where, as head of the Exhibition Room in the old Pack Library, he worked with Friends of the Library as he established the library's first phonograph record collection, its film and book programs for children, and an educational film program that became one of the library's basic services. Later, as Director of Community

Activities, he spoke to community groups, wrote for Asheville newspapers, edited the library's newsletter "Happenings," and introduced countless students to the services of the library. In January 2011, the children's reading room at Pack Memorial Library was named in his honor.

John was an actor and singer in Asheville for more than 75 years. His stage debut came at age seven, when he played Prince Valiant in a 1934 production of Prince Charming. In high school he was active in theater productions under legendary teacher Dr. Elizabeth Welch, and while at Asheville Biltmore College he performed with the student theater troupe and with the Players Guild, a precursor of Asheville Community Theater. Beginning in 1946, its founding year, John performed in more than 60 ACT productions, making his last appearance in 2009 in the Autumn Players' production of Mornings at Seven. He is well remembered for musicals such as 1776, Fiddler on the Roof, Oliver, and Annie, and plays as diverse as The Crucible, Look Homeward, Angel, and Blithe Spirit—plus one of his favorite roles, the witch in Hansel and Gretel. He also appeared as a guest artist in at least 15 productions at UNC Asheville and served for many years as cantor and as tenor soloist at area synagogues and churches.

For 30 years John hosted "Tea and Symphony," a Friday program designed to prepare audiences for the coming weekend's Asheville Symphony Orchestra performance. He wrote reviews for The Asheville Citizen-Times from 1968 to 1996, and then for the ASO website. He was a dedicated supporter of the Asheville Chamber Music Society (ACMS), Asheville Bravo Concerts, and Brevard Music Center, and maintained his annual subscription to ASO until his death. John led many groups on overseas tours to experience theater, opera, and symphony performances in European capitals, avidly studying Russian, French, and German in preparation for his travels. He also addressed Asheville's Pen & Plate club, of which he was a long-time member, on numerous occasions.

John also helped to develop the curriculum for UNC Asheville's College for Seniors at the Center for Creative Retirement (now Osher Lifelong Learning Institute). He joined the faculty in its inaugural year, 1988, and taught more than a dozen courses in art history, dramatic literature, and film analysis.

In 2012 John was recognized by Asheville Living Treasures for his lifelong dedication to the arts. And, in the words of the plaque presented by the Buncombe County Public Library System upon his retirement, "John was one of those rare persons whose lives become indistinguishably melded with the work that they do."

John is survived by cousins in western North Carolina and Ohio plus a host of friends near and far. Before his death he donated his vast collection of books and music to support Friends of the Library. A special memorial sale of the "John Bridges Collection" is scheduled for Friday, Dec. 4, 2015, at Pack Library, 67 Haywood Street.

The funeral will be held at Morris Funeral Home, 304 Merrimon Avenue on Friday, Nov. 27, 2015, at 2:00 p.m., with visitation beginning at 1:00 p.m. He will be interred in Riverside Cemetery.

Morris Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Previous Events

Family will Receive Friends

NOV 27. 1:00 PM (ET)

Morris Funeral & Cremation Care
304 Merrimon Ave.
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 252-1821
info@morrisfamilycare.com
<http://www.morrisfamilycare.com>

Funeral Service

NOV 27. 2:00 PM (ET)

Chapel of Morris Funeral Home
304 Merrimon Ave.
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 252-1821
info@morrisfamilycare.com
<http://morrisfamilycare.com>

Tribute Wall



“ *Morris Funeral & Cremation Care created a Tribute Video in memory of John Anthony Bridges*



Morris Funeral Home - November 25, 2015 at 12:39 PM



“ *John Anthony Bridges*

October 07, 2023 at 11:15 AM



“ *30 files added to the album Life Tributes*



Morris Funeral Home - November 25, 2015 at 12:29 PM

WL

“ At Chapel Hill in 1958, John was a life-saver for me at a critical point in my career. He helped me understand who I was, where my talents lay, and my worth. Better than any psychiatrist that I was seeing at the time, John introduced me to a world of arts, literature, theater, travel that broadened my vision and healed my soul. I shall never forget how he personally escorted me through the rituals of Wagner at Bayreuth in 1972. I became a librarian partly due to his influence. John gave me my first taste of the delightful city of Asheville. I am grateful that John's life touched mine.

W, Noah Lindsay - November 24, 2015 at 07:02 PM

BT

“ my learned friend & maestro, at a time like this it seems best to console myself & others with a wise word of rabbinic advice: "just keep thanking some real god for the life that was." meanwhile, just one p.s. i don't think, prior to this photo, that i ever saw your head without a beret. (as a dual citizen, born in paris, one of several berets serves as my kippah too.) shalom, dear friend

bill thurman - November 24, 2015 at 02:39 PM



“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



Morris Funeral Home - November 23, 2015 at 10:08 AM