



John J. Velie

November 24, 1936 - June 13, 2015

Albany-John J. Velie, 78, died at home Saturday, June 13, 2015. Born November 24, 1936 to Helen Casey Velie and Orville L. Velie in Poughkeepsie, NY and grew up along the banks of his beloved Hudson River in Hyde Park.

Velie graduated from SUNY Albany (1962) and Cornell University (1964) where he received the A.M. Drummond Award for play direction. His original play, 'The East Room,' was chosen to represent Cornell University at the 1964 Yale Drama Festival.

Velie taught English and drama from 1964-1994 at Albany High School where he ran the theater department and directed over thirty plays. He was also the founder and director of several Albany based theater companies including Center Ensemble, the summer children's theater Raggedy Ann's Kitchen, Shakespeare on the Plaza, Shakespeare in the Park and Albany Public Theater.

In 2010 Velie was inducted into the Albany City School District Hall of Fame. He is survived by his wife of fifty-six years Sondra, daughter Ashley, son-in-law Kevin Monahan, grand-daughter Emmanuelle, sister Helen Riley and nephews Scott and Curtis Velie and David and Daniel Riley.

All are invited to visit with Sondra and her family Thursday evening, June 18,

2015 4:00 to 7:00 pm in the McVeigh Funeral Home, 208 North Allen Street, Albany.

On Friday, June 19, 2015 all are invited to gather at the funeral home at 12:30 pm to proceed to St. Agnes Cemetery for some personal talks and readings.

To leave a message for the family, obtain directions, light a candle or view other helpful services please visit www.McveighFuneralHome.com

Cemetery Details

St. Agnes Cemetery

48 Cemetery Ave
Menands, NY

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 18. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

McVeigh Funeral Home, Inc.
208 N Allen St
Albany, NY 12206
(518) 489-0188
info@mcveighfuneralhome.com
<http://www.McveighFuneralHome.com>

Gathering

JUN 19 (ET)

McVeigh Funeral Home, Inc.
208 N Allen St
Albany, NY 12206
(518) 489-0188
info@mcveighfuneralhome.com
<http://www.McveighFuneralHome.com>

Tribute Wall



“ *John J. Velie*

October 08, 2023 at 09:24 PM



“ *I knew John many years ago in 1957-58. From the many accolades I've read that his friends and colleagues have written, I see that he has become the famous man he had dreamed of being.*

Joanne (Derr) Steele

Joanne Steele - June 30, 2016 at 09:07 PM



“ *May the words at Isaiah 25:8 bring you comfort " He will swallow up death forever, And the Sovereign Lord Jehovah will wipe away the tears from all faces."*

M - August 24, 2015 at 10:20 PM

PR

“ How can John Velie be gone? He was a force of nature, so full of life and creative energy, a bracing wind blowing in off the Irish Sea. On the terrace of the State Museum, at the Lake House in Washington Park, on the campus of the Academy of the Holy Names in his own Wooden O, and on stages throughout the area, he commanded our attention. He could move us to tears and laughter, fill us with love and anger all through a sheer force of will. And after hours, in places like the back room of Caruso's Tavern, with other luminaries like Joe Kilgallen, Red Sutton, Tim Kitzrow, Brian Nutter, Becky Haven and Pat Devane, he would raise the roof with Irish tales and Celtic laughter.

Da, The Diviners, The Seagull, Moby Dick, Tom Payne, Waiting for Godot, All the Way Home, and all the Shakespeares: Henry IV, Part 1, A Midsummer Nights Dream (twice) Romeo and Juliet, The Tempest. John directed me in all of these and more, giving me the gifts of some of the greatest roles in the English speaking theatre. He was a brilliant director and, moreover, a loyal and generous friend. I will miss him deeply. His passing leaves a larger-than-life hole in our world.

His legacy is in our collective memory, as performers, technicians, friends and audience. As long as we tell the stories of his life with us; reminisce and recreate the times when the creative lightning flashed around us all, when his booming voice echoed off the walls, the marble and the trees, the air will still be filled with his spirit.

Phil Rice - June 19, 2015 at 12:57 PM

“ As hundreds did before me, I first met John Velie as the director of a drama that was very special to me.

My growing up in Ireland had not prepared me to meet an American who could deeply psych out the essence of an Irish playwright's vision, even though i went to a school that lived and breathed theater, one that produced actors and directors of international renown.

But then I had never met such a gentle poet of the very spirit of theater as John Velie.

Behind that benevolent and kindly face lurked a passion for excellence that seemed to live for the art and deny the self.

In THE WEIR he brought together a most unlikely group of actors and united our diverse talents and personalities in a shared recognition of Conor McPherson's unearthing of the real ethos of modern rural Ireland.

Thanks to John's quiet wisdom I gained lasting new friends in Colleen Levitt, Tony Pallone, Brian Massman and Ted Phelps. In some ways he reminded me of my great friend and professional mentor, Louis I. Kahn.

One day when Colleen could not appear for rehearsals, the beautiful Sondra Velie stepped in without hesitation to superbly fill the role of Valerie.

It was then I knew that John's art was a joint effort of his penetrating insight and her rocklike support.

My heart goes out especially to Sondra, their daughter and their son.

It goes out, too to the many lovers of theater whose lives have been joyously inspired and continue to be influenced by John Velie's modest genius.

So let us all remember him with light in our mind's eyes and serenity in our spirits.

Patrick J. Quinn.

Patrick Quinn - June 18, 2015 at 02:26 PM

JM

“ *John was an outstanding teacher, role model and creative force for theatre and Albany's children. His memory lives on in the heart of drama.*

joanne McElroy-Moore - June 18, 2015 at 08:03 AM

 Judy
Tate

“ Dear Sondra and Ashley,

My heart goes out to you both.

John gave me my first paying theatre gig when he cast me as Coriander Seed in Raggedy Ann's Kitchen. "Cora Anderson" we used to joke, imagining her in a rocker, crocheting doilies at 80.

I was a kid in school and learned through Alex that John was looking to cast someone and that Alex's brother Cleve would be in the ensemble. So I got on a bus with my guitar and sat in your living room, played my songs and crooned my heart out for John. That summer was one of the highlights of my life. I learned so much from John.

He was so excited by young people, by the theatre, by music and by the sheer energy of creation. He had such patience with us all, such joy. I don't know how you put up with us in your living room endlessly singing Stevie Wonder's "Songs in the Key of Life", drinking beers and buttermilk and eating you out of house and home.

John modelled passion not just for the theatre, but for living a creative life. He taught me to watch strangers interacting because their movements would teach me about positioning and spatial relationships. Teaching was his talent and joy and it rubbed off. I've never left the theatre and never stopped trying to be as generous and spirited a teacher as John was. He will always live in my heart.

Love,

Judy Tate

Judy Tate - June 17, 2015 at 09:26 PM

RS

“ I am so thankful to John for letting me chase that whale, cast those spells, wear those crowns and play with Raggedy Ann. Thankful above all for sharing your family with mine. We had a good run, my brother. My sympathy and love to Sondra, Ashley and especially Emmanuelle, who was the song in her Grandpa's heart.
Red Sutton

Red Sutton - June 17, 2015 at 08:00 PM

Amy
McCabe

“ To the Velie Family,

It has been many decades but I will always fondly remember meeting John as the little sister of Catherine McCabe and feeling so grown-up being included in the activities of that whole group that included John and Cleve Thomas and John McTiernan and many other lovely souls.

I will always be grateful for the great experience of being directed by John in his production of Trojan Women one summer and feeling so special since I was the only child to be given a line in the play. I think he was playing favorites.

I'm sure Ashley doesn't remember when I used to babysit her since she was so little but I have never forgotten what a lovely family John, Sondra and Ashley were and how I loved to hang out with them.

Then I had the pleasure of being in John's class at Albany High and us remembering those earlier years and making sure we kept some of it under our hat.

My deepest sympathies to all who love John. He certainly touched a lot of lives and brought the joy of theater to so many.

Amy McCabe

Amy McCabe - June 17, 2015 at 07:30 PM



“ Dear Sondra and Ashley: So many years have passed, it is likely my name no longer registers with you, (especially with Ashley) but I just learned of John's passing and I want to express my most sincere condolences. I regret allowing such friendships to go so long unattended, most often at times like these. I count my summer playing in the Raggedy Ann's Kitchen band as one of my most memorable and that experience continues to inform my musical efforts to this day. John was very special to so many people and I know you will miss him dearly.

With love,

Jack Maebly

jmaebly@gmail.com

www.littlefaithmusic.com

Jack Maebly - June 17, 2015 at 05:28 PM



Alexander
Thomas

“ Dear Sondra & Ashley,

Much love to you in this time.

Sondra, I've already talked to you and you know that I won't be able to make Friday due to some of my own health issues. I will make the memorial gathering you plan later or just get to Albany soon to visit. It's been far too long and John's passing highlights the mis-step it is to procrastinate on reaching out to those who've played significant roles in your life. Saying John is significant in my life is an understatement.

To be fair John's first influence on my life was vicariously through my brother Cleve. John opened up Cleve's world and Cleve went back home to the projects and immediately started opening my world. One that looked very limited and bleak at the time.

Cleve, who was always magical, was full of ideas, choices and change. I knew the name of the source (Mr. Velie) well by the time I finally met him. An unforgettable day lodged snugly in my memories.

Cleve had taken me and sat me down in this dark auditorium. I had only a vague notion of what a "play" was and no idea what the heck a Spoon River was. But I was transfixed watching these kids who all seemed like giants from another universe to me, doing these Spoon Rivers. Suddenly from behind me out of the blackness this deep, rich, resonating (I didn't even know the word resonating) voice that gave me chills would boom out some command and say a few things and then the kids would do again what they were doing only even better. I had found my home. I had found my life. I had met Mr. Velie.

*Again, much love,
Alex*

Alexander Thomas - June 17, 2015 at 03:37 PM

ML

“ *Because of John Velie, we dueled with the English in Scotland and we invaded ancient Troy, the latter to Penderecki's "Threnody"; we stood and spoke in a cemetery on a hill in Spoon River, Illinois, recalling America's first century; and we romped and farced and magicked, wearing - but never fully hiding behind - papier mache masks, as 16th century Commedia dell Arte heroes and villains.*

John brought us - all of us - to these worlds and to many others. We found expression in our assumed identities that we could not have imagined, and became citizens of shared experiences that none of us will ever forget.

Ave atque vale, John Velie.

~

*Mark Lamar,
New Brunswick, New Jersey*

Mark Lamar - June 17, 2015 at 02:57 PM

RS

“ *How lucky we were to have know him, to have felt his influence, to have shared his friendship, to have basked in his presence for so long. He will live on in the memories of all his students, friends, and family. Love never dies. My condolences to Sondra and family, and to the entire community on the loss of this wonderful man.*

Risa Scranton - June 17, 2015 at 02:45 PM

JR

“ Dearest Velie Family,

The freshest memories are of John's retirement party, and the happy times I was able to see him after he retired, as well as that I was very blessed to have him share his writing with me. I hope publication will allow us all to continue to share his wonderful vision and talent with all the world.

Over most recent years, I have been away for work so much but want to truthfully tell you he and the family were vividly in my thoughts on last Saturday, long before I received the news of his passing. I am away now and am sad that I can't be there in person to support the family and to celebrate John's life and legacy, but please know I am there in spirit and hope to connect in His time.

Love,

Jude

Jude Rickman - June 17, 2015 at 11:38 AM

JM

The man was a true visionary. His impact and influence on young HS actors was profound. I had the honor and privilege to experience this great teacher, who had the ability to transform students into thinking beyond the box, and to see themselves in new ways of self expression. his inspiration and love of craft, was directly responsible for launching some highly acclaimed professional acting and directing careers. He was a joy to be around and involved with. He loved what he did, and in turn was loved by many, many people. The world has a little less light in it with his passing. He was a humble, great man, and educator in every sense of the word. Thank you, John Velie for being here when we needed you the most. Love Jerry Mall

Jerry Mall - June 17, 2015 at 08:22 PM

NM

“ John Velie:

No one talked like him, laughed like him, thought like him or taught like him.

He brought magic and consistency to those of us lucky enough to have been part of The Scene and how lucky we were...

He is remembered with love and gratitude.

My deepest condolences to Sondra and her and John's family.

*"Now cracks a noble heart-- good night, sweet prince,
and flights of angels sing these to thy rest!--"*

Nancy McTiernan Maxwell

Nancy McTiernan Maxwell - June 17, 2015 at 08:18 AM

NM

Oh, Dear Mr. Velie... a typo in my thought...just like old times, eh?

Nancy McTiernan Maxwell - June 17, 2015 at 08:29 AM

LB

“ *John Velie left a magical fingerprint on our young lives. He embodied and magnified the creativity and energy of the late 1960s for my peers and spun the magic for many AHS classes thereafter. He was bigger than life.*

Linda L. Bacon - June 16, 2015 at 10:11 PM

TL

“ Oh, I loved John ("Mr. Velie" to students like me) so much. He always treated high school drama--the shy, chubby little brother of high school activities--with the kind of energy and respect one would usually reserve for adults and, in doing that, I think he actually made me a bit more mature in the process. I still think a lot about what challenging and smart (and dark) material he would choose for those spring one-acts, and the way he held on to all of that great '60s hipster slang, and would drop it sometimes while addressing us. (I think he called me 'maaaaaan' before I ever called myself one.) My comfort onstage later, as a comic and a performer, owes a lot to John Velie's commanding and warm presence during my high school years. I'll miss him, as everyone must. -- Todd Levin (AHS Class of '89)

Todd Levin - June 16, 2015 at 08:45 PM


Stephanie
Wunderlich

“ Thank you Mr. Velie for choosing a play I wrote to be performed on stage. Thank you for believing in me and respecting me. Thank you for the confidence in my work you planted in that moment. 25 years later, I can still vividly remember his arm around my shoulder with pride and his laugh that filled the room. - Stephanie Wunderlich

Stephanie Wunderlich - June 16, 2015 at 08:07 PM

SC

“ From *Imaginary Invalid* through *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Moby Dick*, *Antigone*, *Summertree*, *School Play* and *The Circle is Broken* John taught, formed and mentored me. I am but one of your legacy - I'll always treasure and love you. Thank you, Teacher.

Shauna Vooris Connelly - June 16, 2015 at 05:54 PM

RA

“ *John Velie was my one and only mentor. The lessons he taught me and the confidence he gave me have lasted a lifetime. In this time of sadness, remember his unique laugh ; share it with his wonderful family, his family of students and the wind.*

Rena Abelson



rena abelson - June 16, 2015 at 05:04 PM

RS

“ *One of the great teachers of my lifetime*

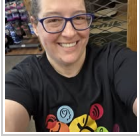
Richard Stevens - June 16, 2015 at 04:52 PM

SS

“ *Ah, John. Charismatic, challenging, a pied piper who drew from children the depths of their expression. A lifelong friend and mentor to me and so many others. I'll miss you but will keep all you have given and meant to me close to my heart. ❤️ Sharon Siegel*



Sharon D Siegel - June 16, 2015 at 03:30 PM



“ *Mr. Velie was an amazing teacher and I was blessed to have had him in my life. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family in this difficult time.*

Sari Medick - June 16, 2015 at 03:11 PM

EA

Mr Velie was a great teacher and mentor he will be well remembered

Eric Aronson - June 16, 2015 at 03:28 PM

TS

An amazing teacher!!! He will be missed

tina snide - June 16, 2015 at 04:38 PM

JR

Shakespeare, Moliere, Sam Shepard, John Guare...Mr. Velie respected his students, aged 14-18, enough to entrust them with material that was challenging, innovative and provocative. He was a great teacher, a consummate professional and a true artist. I am forever grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from him.

Josh Rozett - June 16, 2015 at 04:46 PM

MB

John Rozett, you said exactly what I was thinking. He respected us enough to allow us to elevate our work to a higher level. He's the reason I am on stage now, 25 years after high school graduation. RIP, Mr. Velie. ❤️

Mara (Fruiterman) Bayewitz - June 16, 2015 at 06:07 PM

RN

My deepest condolences and sympathies on the passing of a great thespian coach , who will be missed !

Ronald C. Newton - June 16, 2015 at 09:17 PM

CB

"Though lovers be lost, love shall not; And death shall have no dominion." - Dylan Thomas.

Cheryl Bentley - June 17, 2015 at 10:09 AM