



LOCAL OBITUARIES

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Playwright Richard Janero groomed Tony winners from — a Miami Dade pig pen?

BY HOWARD COHEN

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The path to the Tony Awards stage at the opulent Radio City Music Hall in New York City has a direct link to a pigpen once on the grounds of Miami Dade College's North Campus.

From this unlikeliest of places, playwright and arts educator Richard Janero began molding actors who, for some, would one day achieve the highest honors in the craft.

Janero, a playwright who helped develop the New World School of the Arts and served as its associate dean of theater, died Thursday in West Kendall at 89 of complications from pneumonia.

Janero's published plays included "Youth and Asia," "The Wild Harp," "The Silence of Antonio Palli" and "Love Comes to the Monastery."

The origins of Janero's towering teaching career in theater arts began at the University of Miami in 1953 when the Harvard graduate taught in the English department with English and humanities teacher Thelma Altschuler. The pair later wrote and edited "The Art of Being Human," a seminal humanities textbook published in 1979. The book's 11th edition was issued earlier this year.

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SO MANY PEOPLE WERE AFFECTED BY HIS ENTHUSIASM FOR THE THEATER.

Thelma Altschuler, co-author "The Art of Being Human."

In 1961, Janero began Miami Dade College's theater program and he founded the school's then-aptly named Pen Players.

"We had no facilities except for an abandoned farm, and we rehearsed in a pigpen. We'd be out in the hot sun, blocking plays in the pigpen," Janero recalled in a 1987 Miami Herald profile.

When the college joined with the Miami-Dade County Schools in the Performing and Visual Arts Center (PAVAC) dual-enrollment program, by which students could take college-level performing arts courses before they graduated from high school, Janero served as the PAVAC director from 1982 to 1987.

The program evolved into the New World School of the Arts, an institution Janero co-founded with Marcy Sarmiento and Kandell Bentley-Baker in 1987. He became its interim dean of theater until 1988, then associate dean of theater until his retirement in 1996. He was soon lured back to teach playwrighting, a position he held until 2012.

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THE MAJOR THING ABOUT RICHARD IS HE LOVED TEACHING. HE ADORED HIS STUDENTS.

Patrice Bailey, dean of the Theater Division at New World School of the Arts.

He wanted to forge a company of talented repertory actors, give them world-class training in the city and prepare them for careers from South Florida outward.

In 2011, when Janero was celebrating the completion of the 10th edition of “The Art of Being Human,” he invited about 12 former students to join him for dinner in New York City, actor and fellow teacher David Kwiat recalled. “Michael Aronov, who just won a Tony for Best Actor in the production of ‘Oslo,’ was one of the honored guests. Nothing made Richard happier than to bask in the successes of his students.”



Michael Aronov, a New World grad, won the Tony for Best Featured Actor in a Play for “Oslo.” He poses in the press room during the 2017 Tony Awards on June 11, 2017, in New York City.

Jemal Countess - Getty Images for Tony Awards Productions

In June, Janero relished the Tony victories of former New World students Aronov and Alex Lacamoire, who won his third Tony for his orchestrations for the musical, “Dear Evan Hansen.” Katie Finneran was another one of Janero’s students who won two Tonys for her roles in “Noises Off” in 2002 and “Promises, Promises” in 2010.

“Richard had a mind like a steel trap. Right up to the end,” said Kwiat. “Only two weeks ago he laughed when he told me a friend once was doing a crossword puzzle which asked ‘What were the names of King Lear’s dogs?’ Well, of course, Richard immediately said ‘Tray, Blanche and Sweetheart.’ That was Richard. He could recite epic poems by heart, Shakespearean verse, not to mention dirty limericks.

“To entertain Richard while he was in assisted living, I was reading a quote from the 16th century playwright Ben Johnson. Of course, as I was reading it, he proudly interrupted me and finished the quote. Word perfect,” said Kwiat.

Janaro’s arts education began at Harvard — he grew up three miles away. For that reason he was a little disappointed when his parents, immigrants from Italy, told him that Harvard was all they could afford. He graduated in 1949 with a degree in theater history and criticism.

As an undergraduate, he was in the Harvard Dramatic Club, which was “a bunch of dilettantes putting on plays, a social club,” Janaro told the Herald in 1987. He was asked to join the Harvard Veterans Theatre even though he had been too young to serve in World War II.

That company evolved into the Brattle Theatre Company, a dominant force in Boston theater in the early 1950s, and it was there that he got his professional theater education — and decided that his future was not in acting. Janaro had married young and had a daughter, Laura, and he felt that academic theater would provide a way to support his family.

“He had a great ability to find talent and encourage people,” said Altschuler. “It would be a mistake to say he was only a theater person. He was truly a humanist.”

Much of his work tapped his life experiences. “Youth and Asia” (say it out loud to glean its subject matter) blended humor with wrenching drama. His late sister once asked him to assist in her passing; he declined.

“WOPS,” a memoir that focused on four generations of his Italian immigrant family, was one of his many works to enjoy readings at GableStage. “He was an influence on so many young people who went into theater,” said Joseph Adler, GableStage’s producing artistic director. “He kept writing, never stopped working on new plays, and his enthusiasm was never abated.”

Added Christine Dolen, former theater critic for the Miami Herald: “Richard was a wonderful man, a great teacher from the earliest days of New World, mentor to Tony winners and a fine playwright. He and my dad worked together a number of times, and I know they always valued their collaborations.”



HE WAS A PROFESSOR, DIRECTOR, AN INSPIRATION, A MENTOR, FRIEND, PSYCHOLOGIST, CONFIDANT, FATHER FIGURE, WHO NOW LEAVES US AN IMPORTANT LEGACY AND VOLUMES OF LIFE LESSONS.

Former New World student Max Pearl, on Facebook.

Patrice Bailey, dean of the Theater Division of New World School of the Arts, met Janaro when she was 17 and a student at Miami Dade College’s North campus.

When Bailey returned to Miami Dade in 1977, she taught an art and philosophy course with Janaro at the Wolfson campus. She later convinced him to return to New World in 2003 to serve as an adjunct theater professor.

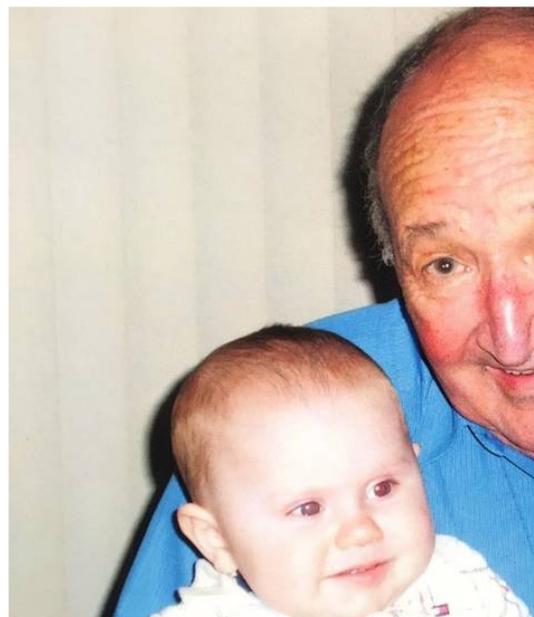
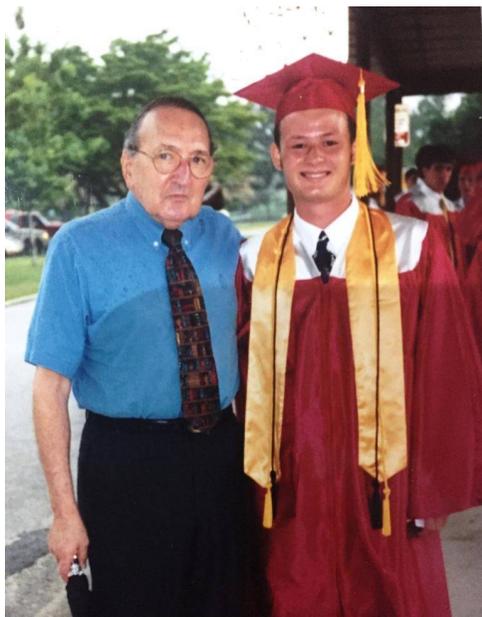
“Richard really watched my education process ... he was so proud that we were working together as colleagues. It doesn’t get better than that as a teacher,” Bailey said.



Alex Lacamoire, a New World grad, won the Tony for Best Orchestrations for “Dear Evan Hansen.” He poses in the press room during the 2017 Tony Awards on June 11, 2017, in New York City.

Mike Coppola - Getty for Tony Awards Productions

Janaro’s survivors include his daughter Laura Potter, grandson David Janaro and great-grandchildren Mica and Josiah. A visitation will be held from 5-9 p.m. Tuesday at Van Orsdel, 11220 N. Kendall Dr., followed by services at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday.





Richard Janero (left) with his grandson David. Courtesy David Janaro

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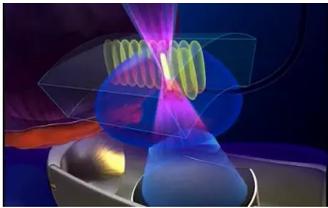
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