

JOHN BALAMOS



John Balamos A Man With Passion for Music and Life

John Balamos was a passionate New Yorker with humble Decatur beginnings. He died February 9 2011, in New York City, and left a rich legacy as an **accomplished pianist, music teacher, composer, beloved family member and friend.**

"I work long hours every day and love it - retirement is dumb. I can't imagine doing nothing," said Balamos in a recent Decatur Herald & Review article. "As a rule, artists don't retire. Art is everything."

Balamos lived these words up until his last moments: He died after a full day of work, followed by dinner with family and friends. He was 83 years old.

Balamos composed numerous choral compositions and New York productions. He was the recipient of Rockefeller and JM Kaplan grants that recognized his teaching innovations for creativity with music. Most recently, Balamos was working on "**Drum Taps,**" a dramatic adaptation of the Civil War based on the play by Joseph Scott Kierland.

Born the son of Greek immigrants, Pete and Dionecea Balamos, November 19, 1927, **his passions in life were simple: music, family, friends and New York City (NYC).** "John had a way of encouraging people to reach their potential whether in music or in life," says his brother Dino Balamos.

This sentiment was shared by the hundreds of friends and family members at a memorial service celebrating his life February 11, at The 92nd Street Y in New York City. "**John had an extraordinary impact on our organization and our multiple generations of students. He was an inspirational human being,**" said Jo Frances Brown, Director of the 60+ Program.

His sister Bess Greanias shared a story about John's earliest request for a piano: "It was the post-depression era and our Father told him the family couldn't afford one. However, the next day a piano was mysteriously delivered to our home."

Balamos trained in the classics and had a special passion for music of Johann Sebastian Bach. **He studied with Elizabeth Travis of Millikin University and also at Indiana University School of Music.**

His early compositions integrated **Eastern/Greek Orthodoxy and Byzantine music** in three choral pieces: **“In The Shelter of Thy Wings;” “Out of Thy Depths;”** and **“Come Unto Me.”** Balamos’ original composition **“Africa”** was dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In 1975, Balamos was awarded a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to explore new methodologies in teaching music. A “Creative Sense of Music” was produced. Research at the Manhattan School of Music culminated in a Carnegie Hall lecture series for music educators. **His work was recognized by leadership at high-profile music institutions including Yale University and Juilliard School of Music.**

Over the last 25 years, Balamos further developed these improvisation concepts in more than 60 multi-general programs and what he referred to as “classical jam sessions.”

Balamos’ productions include musical scores for: **Twelfth Night, As You Like it; John Henry, Garden of Sweets; and The Glass Menagerie.** Movie credits include **Hercules in New York, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger.** Collaborations with Lyricist June Barbour resulted in musical productions including **The Vegas Notion** and **Gyrant, The Terrible Tyrant.** The latter was performed locally in Decatur by Theatre 7 in 1982.

Balamos believed in living life to its fullest every step of the journey. He scoffed when he heard a friend lamenting his hectic lifestyle, “Once I’m done with this project, I’ll be out of the woods...” Balamos responded with a smile, “In case you haven’t learned it yet - you’re never out of ‘the woods’...‘the woods’ is it!”

Single Compositions:

- **In The Shelter of Thy Wings** - Choral Composition
- **Out of Thy Depths** - Choral Composition
- **Come Unto Me** - Choral Composition
- **Africa** - Choral Composition
- **Icy Rain** - Vocal/Piano Composition
- **Most Attractive Woman** - Vocal/Piano Composition
- **Encyclopedia** - Vocal/Piano composition
- **When First I Saw Thee Graceful Move** - Vocal/piano composition
- **Song Cycle for T.S. Eliot’s Preludes** - Piano composition
- **Last Days of Constantinople** - Piano solo
- **Dance of The Trolls** - Children’s piano piece

Full Musical Score:

- **The Vegas Notion** (Script/Musical Score)
- **English Muffins** (Musical Score)
- **Garden of Sweets** (Musical Score)
- **Shakespeare’s As You Like It** (Musical Score)
- **Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night** (Musical Score)
- **Glass Menagerie** (Musical Score)
- **John Henry** (Musical Play)
- **Hercules in New York** (Movie Score)
- **Emmanuel** (Musical Score)
- **Drum Taps** (Musical adaption/play)
- **Gyrant The Terrible Tyrant** (Musical Score)
- **Ballad of Fangless McRattle** (Musical Score)

Memorials may be sent to Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, 570 N. Union, Decatur, IL 62522,
or to the 92nd Street Y, 60+ Program, 1395 Lexington Avenue, New York, Now York, 10128

