



Robert William Johnson

December 19, 1936 - January 19, 2016

Robert W. Johnson, 79, died Tuesday, January 19, 2016, at Memorial Hospital at Easton, MD, after a long illness.

Bob leaves his wife, Sandra Johnson; his three daughters, Laurie A. Johnson Keller and her husband Scott of Harvard, MA, Leslie J. Johnson of Acton, MA, and Lisa M. Perkins and her husband Sheldon of North Yarmouth, ME; his two stepsons, Christopher F. Graves and his wife Jennifer of Sandy, UT, and Jeremy C. Graves and his wife Rachel of North Grafton, MA; his stepdaughter, Marjory Handel of Columbia, CT; his brother, William Johnson and his wife Sheila of Fort Myers, FL; six grandchildren, Emily and Christian, Libby, Maggie, Alison, Jackson; and a nephew, Todd Johnson and his wife Andree of Tewksbury, MA.

Bob was born December 19, 1936, in Methuen, MA, and is predeceased by his parents, William and Gladys (Roberts) Johnson, and his sister, Donna Johnson Caffrey. Both sets of Bob's grandparents had emigrated from England and Sweden to work in the Lawrence mills.

Bob attended Methuen schools where he led his graduation exercise as senior cadet. His interest in the military led to a four-year service in the United States Air Force. He served in such contrasting places as the tropical Eniwetok Atol, part of the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific, to frigid

Presque Isle in the northernmost reaches of Maine.

After military service, Bob worked as a technical writer first for Raytheon Corporation and then for Digital Equipment Corporation before retiring.

In addition to his day job, Bob was a well-known and accomplished New England-based jazz guitarist and composer. His album, *Musings*, is enjoyed by people around the world. One of the highlights of Bob's musical career was playing with the Phill Argyris Quartet in Pont-Aven, France.

In the Greater Boston area, Bob had the pleasure of playing with Herb Pomeroy, Peter Kontrimas, Joe Hunt, Peter Diodati, Jim Gebo, Phill Argyris, Gerry Wilfong, John Connolly, John Lockwood, Dennis Kistler, Bob McHenry, Bill Pierce, Stan Strickland, Ron Savage, Ron Mahdi, Phil Grenadier, Lance Bryant, Bill Johnson, Sheldon Perkins, Quique Arroyo, Gwenn Vivian, Ralph Deflorio, Rick Maida, Margot Law, Mark Jodice, Steve Kirby, and John Wilkins.

During Bob's young adulthood, before dedicating his craft to jazz, Bob played with dance bands Jerry Bellanti and the Bell-Airs as well as Rico Barr and the Boston Barristers.

Bob and Sandie lived in Stow, MA, for 22 years and were active members of the Stow Unitarian Universalist Church. In later years, they enjoyed the opportunity to live in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, England, where they made many dear friends. While there, Bob connected with local musicians, performing a number of local concerts. The most formal of his appearances was an afternoon playing for and at the request of the Lord of the Manor in Chipping Campden.

Returning from England, Bob and Sandie moved to warmer climes in Easton, MD, where Bob continued to play music until his recent illness. While in

Maryland, he played jazz with bassists Joe Byrd and Dave Ross and pianists Jim Lester and Joe Holt.

Bob was honored with the inclusion of his photograph in the book "Faces of Jazz" by Ruth Williams alongside Dizzie Gillespie, Rebecca Parris, Artie Shaw, and other widely notable jazz musicians.

From childhood on, Bob was a lifelong supporter of the Boston Red Sox. At age 12, he wrote a letter to the Sox challenging the team to a sand lot game in Methuen, saying "...and if you don't show up, we'll know you're chicken." Years later, Johnny Pesky autographed his biographical book "Mr. Red Sox" with the note, "To Bob, We were scared. Johnny Pesky."

Tribute Wall



“ *Robert William Johnson*

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ *Robert William Johnson*

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM

DR

“ To Sandie and family. You have my sincerest sympathy in Bob's passing. I can't help but echo all the heartfelt comments on Bob's great friendships and musical associations which have been posted to date. I know how much he cherished you and the girls. I was privileged to live across the street from you and Bob for 11 years. In addition to being the kind of friend described in these tributes, Bob was my mentor in jazz ensemble playing. I had the times of my life as I met and played music with Bob and his friends, Friends from here, and those who came down from the Boston area.

In Anne Rivers Siddon's book entitled "Peachtree Road", there is a passage that describes what it was like to be in any sized ensemble with Bob. The passage can also be used to describe what it was like to be in conversation with Bob.

"When we came up out of the smoky dark onto the street, we were sweating and still dazzled and full to our hairlines with the boundless exuberance of the quartet. Their odd-metered time signatures and skittering improvisations were mesmerizing, but the thing that set the room rocking and clapping and shouting aloud was the sheer joy in the music and the unfeigned and open delight in each other that flashed like heat lightning between Brubeck, Morello, Wright and Desmond. Their eyes were constantly on one another; they could sense when one or the other was going to seize a riff before it happened, and would slide back to accommodate it; their heads nodded and grins widened until finally they were nodding and laughing aloud with the wonder of the never-to-be-repeated flight of sound, which careened around the room like a captured bird. When you heard Brubeck and his group, even then, you heard love as well as artistry in action, love for the sound and for each other, and it was impossible not to drown in it and then burst up dripping and shouting."

My heart joins those who were fortunate enough to have known, and made music with Bob Johnson.

Love you Bob, you are finally in peace.

Dave Ross

Dave Ross - February 15, 2016 at 12:32 PM

NR

“ *Our deepest sympathy goes out to the Johnson family. We came across the passing of Bob in the Stow Independent It was so nice to learn about a man who previously lived in our home for many years here in Stow. Bob would of been happy to know that music still fills the home to this day. Our daughter is also a musician and the sounds of guitars and singing continue on. We wish you all strength during these difficult times. May Bob rest in peace.*

-The Ricci Family

Noella Ricci - February 13, 2016 at 09:03 AM

SK

“ *I feel fortunate and honored to have known Bob. He was a wonderful musician and a wonderful human being. He was incredibly supportive of other artists and very sensitive to all things creative. Some of my favorite memories are when, as a fellow guitaris,t Bob and I played gigs together in various venues around the Boston area and when he asked me to play on his CD "Musings". I also enjoyed just having conversations with him about life and music. He was so thoughtful and insightful and generous of spirit, a wonderful human being. He will be greatly missed and his memory he always treasured . (Steven Kirby)*

steven kirby - February 04, 2016 at 08:03 PM

JS

“ *My deepest condolences to the Johnson family. I'm a jazz trumpet player from Leominster, MA and had the pleasure of playing and hanging with Bob several times, most often at Chloes Restaurant in Hudson, MA. I loved his presence, his fantastic conversation, and his playing so very much! He was such a pleasure to work with and just to be around ... such a kind and beautiful soul.*

I know you all loved him so very much as I can completely understand. I am so very sorry for your loss.

In sympathy,

- Jerry Sabatini

Jerry Sabatini - January 31, 2016 at 07:55 PM

 Rico
Barr

“ *In addition to being a fine musician Bob was a fine human being .I will forever cherish the time spent with Bob during the years of our association .RIP my friend
Rico Barr*

Rico Barr - January 28, 2016 at 08:19 AM

JL

“ FOR BOB

I only met Bob when I moved to Easton Club East.

I met a man who loved Jazz as Edie and I do.

*I met a man who was so curious that he invited people he found interesting
out of the blue to have coffee with him and to talk about themselves
and their ideas*

*He did this in such a way that his sincere curiosity won over any
impressions
of weirdness or strangeness, so they had coffee with him and
exposed
themselves to questions that nobody asks and came to engage in
conversations that were incredibly stimulating and interesting*

*I always told Bob that I would have loved to have had him as a
student. In
my early career as a teacher he might have scared me with his off
of the wall questions and later he would have thrilled me with those
strange and extremely stimulating questions*

*As we became friends we talked about anything and everything and
in a way
that I have only experienced with one or two other people in my life.
No ego, no bullshit, just why is that? Damn, that is really interesting
and you knew that he really meant that.*

*I loved going to jazz concerts with a real jazz musician. I loved jazz
but Bob
understood it. He helped me to understand just a little bit about the
wonderful things I was feeling. He beat on me for daring to do
anything but listen intently and seriously to the music. It was almost
sacrilegious to him to do anything that would distract one from THE*

MUSIC.

We also shared some basic values that were all important to us. Nothing was more important than family and when he talked about his three girls or his Sandie, I felt Bob's heart.

Bob asked me to read a book I wrote about something very far removed from anything he could possibly be interested in and I asked him why, and he said he was just interested and you know, even though it was hard, I actually believed him and he actually read it and he asked me some semi-intelligent (said kiddingly) questions and I was so relieved that he did not ask me the questions he really wanted to ask.

Bob was a very special person who I was privileged to call friend. I will dearly miss him. I had so many questions I still wanted to discuss with him.

Bob, goodbye my friend.

*Jim Liesener
1/20/2016*

James W. Liesener - January 25, 2016 at 08:11 AM

MM

“ 1 file added to the album *New Album Name*



Max Murray - January 24, 2016 at 11:23 PM

MM

“ *Dear Sandie and family,*

Please accept my deepest condolences. I had the greatest respect for Bob, as a musician and a person. He made me smile, and could swing like crazy! He was always such a gentleman to me, and went out of his way to let me know how appreciative he was that we were playing together. When conversing, I felt like I was in the presence of a man who had witnessed much, and consequently refused to let negativity waste his time - it was a very positive inspiration. Special guy, glad that our paths crossed. Rest in Peace, Bob.

Wishing you strength and comfort on the road ahead.

Max Murray

(The bass player "guy from Annapolis who played for the recent home concert")

Max Murray - January 24, 2016 at 11:19 PM



Thank you so much for your kind remembrance, Max. I was at the home concert in September, and it was lovely to hear you and my father play together. Really nice photo of the the trio.

Lisa Perkins - January 25, 2016 at 12:27 PM

MS

“ Sandie,

Susan and I were quite saddened to learn of Bob's passing.

Bob was a 21st century "renaissance man." His vast curiosity was piqued and shared by the members of the science discussion group.

As a guitarist, his skills and appreciation of other jazz musicians brought delight to all who heard him play and discourse on the subject. His humanity and intelligence were evident to all who knew him.

He was a "gentle" man and we will miss him.

*Susan & Michael Silver
Easton*

Michael I. Silver - January 22, 2016 at 01:44 PM

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While in Easton, Bob played jazz with some regional musicians, including bassists Joe Byrd, Dave Ross and (the guy from Annapolis who played for the recent home concert), and organist Joe Holt. (You might even ask Dave for names of places, the Avalon Theater, the brick restaurant etc.) In New England, he played with numerous well-known musicians for fifty years. (No need to name them as it won't mean anything to Easton folks.)

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Lisa Perkins - January 21, 2016 at 09:34 AM