



Art & Leisure

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Bertrand Castelli, producer of Broadway hit 'Hair,' dies by boat

PARIS -- Bertrand Castelli, a colorful Frenchman who dabbled in film, painting and theatre but was best known as producer of Broadway hit "Hair," died aged 78 in Mexico this month after being hit by a speedboat.

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lived for the past 15 years in a seaside hotel not far from Cancun where he devoted his time to painting, writing and swimming.

His daughter Pandora Castelli, reached by telephone in Mexico, said a memorial service would be held in New York on September 28 and another in Paris later on. A self-made celebrity, Castelli spent his adolescent years in wartime Paris where "I wanted to be Picasso, I wanted to be Stravinsky," he said. He met and frequented both of them later, along with mime Marcel Marceau, film-maker Louis Malle and singer Charles Aznavour.

In the United States he was befriended by the likes of Gene Kelly, Aldous Huxley and Ray Bradbury.

"He had so many friends," said his daughter Pandora. "But he was very egalitarian. You'd see him playing chess with William Burroughs in the daytime and at night with someone no-one knew."

In Paris, the hardship of the war years prompted the teenager and his friends to paint and to create ballets, operas and plays, and by the time he was 17 he was touring Germany operating the lights for a small circus — gaining skills that were to propel him into ballet and opera in Paris.

Discovering the power of advertising, he gained fame and funds by creating a ballet involving dancers dressed as posters who each advertised different products with companies like Cartier Cointreau and Perrier queueing up to take part.

From staging ballets in Paris he took off for New York in search of new adventures at the age of 24 and then went to work for MGM in Hollywood.

In 1968 he hit world headlines with the seminal hippie musical "Hair," not only Broadway's first rock musical but also the first to show male and female nudity.

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