Robert Guinan CD'84: Five Years Gone

By Bill Bowe CD'97

In getting my files at home organized for transfer to a new computer, I recently discovered two short video clips I had taken at an evening event at The Cliff Dwellers in 2006. Both clips featured the distinguished artist and Cliff Dweller Robert Guinan (1934-2016). It must have been Irish Heritage night at the Club, because in the first clip we have Bob reciting in a brogue and in the second we have Bob singing in a brogue.



It really set me back watching Bob still very much alive and commanding his audience with a completely unexpected and accomplished voice for both poetry and song. It also made me confront the fact that he's now five years gone. Newer members of the Club will only know Bob from his painting of the Members' Table and the lithograph that celebrated the Club's Centennial in 2007. I was privileged to know Bob over the years from lunch conversations at the Members' Table and evenings where he was given to song.

By happenstance, I first shared these clips on St. Patrick's Day with our Members' Committee Chair Bill Drennan CD'02, and Mike Deines, our Communications Committee Chair. Bill quickly wrote me back, "What a treasure Guinan was with his wry sense of humor and his vast repertoire of stories and knowledge of Irish music. It was a blessing to have known him." Bill's response isn't surprising, of course. He is not only a pushover for Irish brogues, but his wife Kathy can be seen in the clip behind Guinan singing the words along with him.

Mike Deines had a similar reaction, "This is a tremendous find for the Club and its history and helps preserve the memory of our modest and revered friend, Bob Guinan."

Bob had friends all over, not just at The Cliff Dwellers. I remember him telling me of visiting a movie set by the Biograph Theater on Lincoln Avenue to see his friend, and collector of his painting, actor Johnny Depp at work. Depp was filming 2009's *Public Enemies* at the time. Bob said he hadn't intended to intrude on the set, but when Depp found out his friend was nearby, work was stopped for a necessary chat between the two master artists of their respective crafts.

Five years ago, our newsletter had these memories of Bob Guinan:

For Bob Guinan

By Eve Moran CD'10

Tell to me, Bob, the tales that well-charmed at the Members' Table.
A table so knowing that it hangs to remind of things that might be.

Sing to me, Bob, those Irish songs
with richly melodic verses
that plead for your voice
intelligent and witty, now sadly silenced.

Paint for me, Bob, the thinking faces
of the lost and the weary,
the jazzed-up scenes that
tear past their frames and
blow into the night.
Sweet bluesy notes that echo still - and evermore.

Know this, Bob, as you walk away
I'm not yet ready to let you go.

Other remarks about Bob at a special remembrance at The Cliff Dwellers April 8, 2016:

- "…May his memory be a blessing…"
- "…coaxed lines and images out of the paper"
- "…painted people with love and respectful admiration for each person"
- "…one of the most accomplished artists you will ever see"
- "…a creator of great beauty—It's maddening to look at the effortless beauty of his work---so connected---so…"
- "…I'm a Bob Guinan groupie"
- "…He told me, 'You'll never meet anyone sitting in your living room.'"
- "…last Saturday—he had paint stains on his fingers…"
- "It's not easy to love an artist. But, goddammit, somebody's got to do it."



Robert Guinan - *Chicago Tribune*

If you'd like to know more about how Bob Guinan could cast such a spell don't miss this WTTW story remembering him: https://news.wttw.com/2016/04/05/chicago-painter-robert-guinan-dead-82.

Here is what the Chicago Tribune had to say about Bob in its obituary: https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/obituaries/ct-robert-guinan-obituary-20160407-story.html.

While those stories have their place, you'll get a more intimate picture of the artist and his work in the link below to a pair of National Public Radio interviews. It begins with Bob's friend Paul Berlanga's description and assessment of Bob's work as an artist.

This is followed by the NPR main course: a wonderful earlier interview with Bob himself. You'll hear Bob talk about his life's journey from Rochester, New York, where he went from being a teenage Toulouse-Lautrec wannabe at night to making false teeth in a dental lab during the day. Then it was off to the Middle East in the Air Force, to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, to finally finding greater success as an artist in Paris and Europe than in his home country: https://www.wbez.org/stories/remembering-the-life-and-work-of-chicago-artist-robert-guinan/376305b1-8fc4-4660-bcb2-882ed64c0aef.

If you take the time listen to Bob in this 2009 NPR interview, you may come to understand that all the hoopla about Bob wasn't just about his art. It was also about that voice. That voice.