



Knox shows a scene from the 1984 film "The Natural," starring Robert Redford, during one of his many library presentations. ■ **More photos, video:** newsday.com/act2

A MASTER of MOVIES and MUSIC

Retired teacher Richard Knox brings a lifelong passion for the arts to a busy schedule of LI lectures

BY ARLENE GROSS
Special to Newsday

Opera, classic films, the music of Rodgers and Hammerstein — these are just a few of Richard Knox's favorite things. And for the past few years, the 68-year-old retired teacher from Merrick has been sharing his love of the arts with audiences around Long Island.

Before retiring, mathematics was the foundation of Knox's career. He taught junior high school math in Brooklyn for 18 years and served as math

coordinator for kindergarten through eighth grades for 21 years in the Copiague School District. After leaving there in 2005, Knox worked for two years as a districtwide math supervisor in the Oyster Bay-East Norwich School District.

As much as he enjoyed math, Knox wanted to follow his passion, and six years ago started hitting the lecture circuit with his program, "Lights! Camera! Trivia!" So far, he has developed more than 20 different lectures for Rich's Multimedia Retrospectives that encompass the performing arts. He keeps a busy

schedule at public libraries on Long Island and gives Hutton House lectures at LIU Post.

It's what he calls his "labor of love," and while there are many speakers who book shows at libraries or other venues every so often, Knox's speaking engagements average one a week. He gets paid \$150 to \$200 for each appearance.

"If you want to know what someone's passionate about, don't watch them when they're working, watch them when they're not working, when they devote their time and

See KNOX on G20

DANIEL BRENNAN

A lecturer's labor of love

KNOX from G19

energy to things they truly love," said Knox, who is married and has a grown son and daughter.

MOVIES AND MUSIC

For as long as he can remember, Knox has been especially drawn to Broadway musicals. As a youngster, he cherished summers at sleepaway camp, where the highlight was putting on musical theater productions of "South Pacific," "Guys and Dolls" and other shows.

Back home in Brooklyn, Knox would often spend Saturday afternoons at movie houses, engrossed in films like "The Incredible Shrinking Man" and "Earth vs. The Flying Saucers."

"As I got older and my taste in films grew a bit more sophisticated," Knox said, "I began to study the behind-the-scenes elements that made some films stand above the rest, whether it was a creative director, outstanding musical score or innovative cinematography."

His love of opera came from his dad, with whom he spent many weekends as a teen, watching standing-room-only

performances at the Metropolitan Opera House when it was on Broadway. Even listening to an opera radio broadcast was an unforgettable experience, he said.

After developing his first movie trivia program, "I wanted to expand it to include the other things that I'm really interested [in] — musicals, musical comedy, great composers like Rodgers and Hart and Cole Porter," Knox said.

Responding to the popularity of ABC's "Dancing With the Stars," he cobbled together a program about Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers for his lecture circuit. An audience member suggested that Knox do a tribute to Gene Kelly, and Knox soon added it to his list of offerings.

'NEW PERSPECTIVE'

Typically, his audiences are familiar with the subject matter, but he enjoys highlighting the nuances of it. For example, after watching an Alfred Hitchcock film, Knox will point out subtleties they may have missed, like the art direction or the director's use of the camera.

"Unless you're a student of the particular art, you're not really thinking about it," he said. "You can't really put into words what those factors are. What I try to do is give a new perspective to the people watching it."

Impressed with Knox's command of his material, Maryellen Cantanno, programming librarian at the Freeport Public Library, plans to make Knox a bimonthly lecturer there. Noting the scope of his lectures — he spoke about Hitchcock for Halloween and presented an African-American theme for Black History Month — she said, "His repertoire doesn't keyhole him to a specific group. He has such a nice temperament. He's the easiest man to work with."

The audience enjoys him because he stops to answer questions, she said. "He's not a person who wants to ramble and hear himself talk. He likes people to add their interests."

Knox is a favorite speaker at LIU's Hutton House lectures, said director Kay Sato. The lectures are part of a non-credit enrichment program geared to older adults. "You can tell that he enjoys the challenge of teaching our population of savvy adults."

Asked how he can do a program repeatedly, seeing the same movie over and over, he replied, "I get enjoyment out of watching it again and seeing how the audience reacts and getting them interactively involved in it" by giving them quick quizzes.

But some of his prized moments come from connecting with audiences at assisted-living residences. Many who attend the show have memory loss and seem to really enjoy the movies. "When they hear a song or they watch Fred Astaire dancing with Ginger . . . it's like the lights go on behind their eyes, and you can see them perk up. And they'll

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Knox delivers a presentation on the role of music in cinema to a rapt audience at the Jericho Public Library.

DANIEL BRENNAN

remember the lyrics to a Rodgers and Hart [song] that they haven't heard in 50 years."

ADDING DEPTH

At a recent lecture at Jericho Public Library on the role of music in the movies, Knox spoke enthusiastically to three dozen or so attendees about great composers who used their music to punctuate dramatic cinematic moments. He illustrated his point with iconic examples, including Bernard Herrmann's strings-only theme for "Psycho," and the soulful notes resonating throughout Elmer Bernstein's score in "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Introducing a film montage, Knox noted composer John Williams' 49 Academy Award nominations and offered the trivia tidbit that Paulette God-

dard was on the short list to play Scarlett O'Hara in "Gone With the Wind." At the end of the program, Joan Filderman, 71, of Merrick said, "I think he's very interesting, very informative, entertaining, enjoyable."

The program was one of Knox's latest attended by Judy Davidson, 78, of Syosset. "I like all his lectures," she said. "He's very interesting."

The lectures bring out the best in him, said Knox's wife, Dana. "He's so inspired by what he's doing, and he's sharing that with others," she said. "It's very nice to see him in his milieu here."

For Knox, it's simply the way he wants to spend his time. "I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't thoroughly enjoy doing it," he said.



DANIEL BRENNAN

Knox, who averages one speaking engagement a week, talks about a scene from "Casablanca" with Ingrid Bergman, above, at the Jericho Public Library.

Talks on movies and more

Richard Knox's lectures on the performing arts are open to all. Library lectures are free; LIU Post's Hutton House lectures at Lorber Hall, \$30. Here are some upcoming appearances. For more, go to rknoxlectures.com

Feb. 20 Lights! Camera! Trivia! LIU Post's Hutton House, 10 a.m.-noon; an interactive program that tests your knowledge of movie trivia; discussion of this year's Oscar contenders; 516-299-2580

March 5 Rosemary Clooney and John Raitt Syosset Library, 2 p.m.; 516-921-7161.

March 27 Shirley Jones and Howard Keel Elmont Library 12:30 p.m.; 516-354-5280

April 9 Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers Farmingdale Library 3 p.m.; 516-249-9090

April 24 Cole Porter Hutton House, 10 a.m.-noon

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