Ralph Peduto, Santa Cruz actor, dies from leukemia

Peers remember his long, varied career

By Kerri Guzman
kguzman@santacruzensentinel.com @kergustavson on Twitter

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He was 72.

Peduto died 12 days after being diagnosed, according to his wife Laura Peduto's Facebook post Tuesday.

"My dear husband and dearest friend physically left our planet yesterday, but will never leave our hearts," wrote Laura Peduto, who added that the details of a memorial service will be announced soon.

Peduto was born and raised in Santa Cruz and played in the University of California, Santa Cruz, student opera and theater productions.

He moved to New York to pursue his career and later moved to Los Angeles.

In the late 1980s, Peduto began to work in Hollywood, where he appeared in many films, TV shows and commercials.

"I don't sing or dance but he convinced me to do it -- that's Ralph," said a friend. "He has this idea, he wants to go with it and he gets you to do it. He believed in me more than I believed in myself.

In 1980, Peduto was cast in the role of the lead in "The Sting" and "Mrs. Doubtfire." He was also a regular on "The Rock." He died of a rare illness, amyloidosis.

"He loved being in the movies but he loved being in Santa Cruz more, I think," said Peduto's daughter, Zara.

Santa Cruz resident Regina Henderson said she and her daughter took acting classes with Peduto around 20 years ago. Henderson said Peduto was an engaging, giving and amazing teacher, and she often ran into him downtown.

"He was like the mayor. People came by to talk to him," Henderson said. "He had a really sweet, like, Joe Pesci voice. He'd say hi and he'd remember your kid's name.

Santa Cruz musician Peter Cor said he helped Peduto produce five songs, including one named "Butt Naked in Linsenstrom," a cautionary tale about the life of a Hollywood actor.

Cor said he started working with Peduto on a stand-up comedy show three months ago, and also recently began attending meditation sessions with Peduto each Monday at Sequoia's Land of Medicine Будда.

The Buddhist teachers dedicated Monday's meditation session to Peduto, the day he died, said Cor.

"He's left a big void on so many levels," Cor said, adding, "but that just shows the kind of guy he was."

Capasso said Peduto was happy making it as far as he did, because of his family.

"I think he always wanted more, a break to get a bigger role, to open more doors. I think we all want that," said Capasso. "But I think at the end of the day, he had his family and that meant more to him than anything else."