

CHARLES GRAY

Former Executive Director of Pittsburgh CLO



Charles "Charlie" Gray died Sunday, September 29, 2024.

Charlie was a learned, passionate, and loving man, who was born in St. Louis, MO, June 17, 1934, to Gilson B. Gray, Jr. and Mary Francis (Buffum) Gray. He had a wonderful time growing up in NYC and spending time in Woods Hole, MA. Charlie attended Phillips Exeter

Academy, and he received a bachelor's degree in literature from Princeton University in 1956.

After serving in the Adjutant General Corps, U.S. Army, Charlie produced industrial films in Europe and returned to the U.S. as assistant director for WCAU-TV in Philadelphia. In 1959 Charlie began working as stage manager/assistant director for several off-Broadway and summer stock productions. He served as production manager for 11 Broadway shows, including production supervisor of Jesus Christ Superstar. The next years brought great success in directing. When appointed executive director and general manager of Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera (PCLO), Charlie had already directed more than 40 musicals and plays in the U.S., Canada, Argentina and Mexico.

Charlie's vision and energy fostered the remarkable growth of the PCLO. From 1982-1996, he produced 85 musicals, toured 9 productions in the U.S., and began the tradition of the annual production of A Musical Christmas Carol. Charlie created several outreach and arts education programs and founded the PCLO Academy of Musical Theater. In 1988 Charlie inaugurated the Richard Rodgers Award and during his leadership brought to Pittsburgh famous awardees, including Mary Martin, Julie Andrews, and Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber. In his dedication to arts education, Charlie founded the Gene Kelly Awards for Excellence in High School Musicals in 1991, which have been recreated in more than 40 cities across the country. Topping off his very successful tenure, Charlie spearheaded the magnificent and unforgettable CLO Golden Anniversary Celebration in 1996.

The current executive producer of the PCLO describes Charlie as "a visionary leader whose contributions to PCLO and the broader arts community will be remembered for generations." He adds, "He will be deeply missed."

His many awards and honors include the following: Phoenix Award for the Buenos Aires production of Jesus Christ Superstar, The New Jersey Music Critics Award for Best Musical Production, Producer of the Year from the National Council of Children and Television, Man of The Year in the Arts from Vectors and the Pittsburgh New Works Festival Lifetime Achievement Award.

Charlie was a founding member and two-time vice president of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre; he sat on many panels for Opera/Musical Theater Professional Companies and overview committees for the National Endowment for the Arts. After retiring from the PCLO in 1996, he continued to serve on the boards of several local arts organizations.

His way of relating to people was a gift. He was open, inviting and sometimes puckish. He had great rapport with the office staff (though they wished Post-its had never been invented) and everyone involved with the PCLO. He understood the importance of communicating and sharing ideas, and he valued the support and input of others. Not that he always agreed with them!

Despite the dedication to his work, family and friends were vital to his happiness, and he felt blessed to have them in his life. Most important to Charlie was his marriage to his wife Patricia, his "best beloved." He enjoyed being a wordsmith and telling stories about his escapades. His family and friends cherish the "doggerel" poems and lyrics he wrote for special occasions. In his retirement, travel became a favorite way to have new experiences and, of course, taste the local wines! His golf game improved, but his patience playing it did not. Charlie's idea of a wonderful time was sharing good food, good wine, and good conversation. A friend said, "A night around the table with Charlie Gray was magic." He was a loving husband, brother, brother-in-law, uncle and friend.

Charlie is survived by his wife, Patricia Palermo Gray; his brother, Gilson B. Gray III (Jean Zimmerman); sister-in-law, Rose Marie Misage; brother-in-law, Dom Palermo (Pat); and brother-in-law, Bob Palermo (Polly). His sister, Gertrude Pardee; and brothers-in-law, Frank (Pete) Pardee and John Misage preceded him in death. He also leaves behind 18 loving nieces and nephews and their 20 children as well as friends who are like family.

Upon retiring from the PCLO, Charlie reflected: "I have worked at what I love, been supported by people I admire and collaborated with the best in the business. All this, and to be empowered to create programs of lasting value to the community all the while receiving incredible love and support by family and friends - what man could ask for more?"

Arrangements are private. There will be a celebration of his life at a later date. Memorial donations may be directed to Pittsburgh CLO in honor of his lasting and transformational legacy. Arrangements by the **WALTER J. ZALEWSKI FUNERAL HOME**, Lawrenceville.

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