

# IN MEMORIAM: MICHAEL HARRISON

*Courtesy Delores Edwards Harding, DGND, and Carl Hossfeld, Baltimore Rotary Club*

*Michael Harrison became a member of the Baltimore Rotary Club in 1989. He would occasionally bring Baltimore Opera Company Singers to the Rotary Club meetings to sing and entertain.*



[The following obituary is excerpted from the *Baltimore Sun*]

Michael Harrison, the former general director of the old Baltimore Opera Company, died of colon cancer complications Nov. 21 at Holy Cross Hospital in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He was 80 and formerly lived in North Baltimore.

He earned a bachelor's degree at Vanderbilt University. An aunt paid for him to attend the Yale School of Drama, and he completed two semesters before being chosen for a role in the 1963 musical "110 in the Shade" on Broadway.

Mr. Harrison later performed in regional theater productions, once on Broadway, and was cast and performed in the role of Tony in the touring company of "West Side Story." Mr. Harrison went on to become general director of the Providence Opera Theatre and the Columbus Opera Company.

He became the general director of the Baltimore Opera Company in 1988 after the death of Jay Holbrook and remained with the company in 2009 after it closed due to financial pressures.

A company history said, "Harrison's expertise in the world of theatre and opera led to a decade of unprecedented growth during the 1990's."

In 1993 he began a Summer Aria Series dedicated to works by American composers. A year later the National Arts Stabilization Fund awarded the company a grant that allowed it to run additional performances.

A history of the Harrison years at the opera company said it continued to expand the repertoire and attract American and internationally renowned artists. "Notable productions from the late 1990s include Sherrill Milnes in 'Falstaff,' Diana Soviero as Madama Butterfly, 'The Flying Dutchman' with James Morris, Chris Merritt and Paul Plishka, and the company's first Russian opera in 20 years, Tchaikovsky's 'Eugene Onegin' starring Dwayne Croft," the history said.

Mr. Williams said that during his tenure, Mr. Harrison assembled acclaimed productions with international conductors and performers. Among the most memorable productions were "Dead Man Walking," with Sister Helen Prejean and composer Jake Heggie in the audience, and "Norma," attended by Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia, who were both opera fans.

Mr. Harrison will be interred in a family plot in Westover Memorial Park in Augusta.

Mr. Harrison leaves no immediate survivors. His marriage ended in divorce. A son, Graham Bernard Harrison, died of acute lymphocytic leukemia in 2009 at age 15 as a Friends School freshman.

***"Science has broken down the barriers between people, but that merely accentuates our problems, particularly those which arise out of misunderstandings, unless there is also a spiritual growth. For every shortening of the distance between peoples, there must be a broadening of human sympathies."***

***-- Clinton P. Anderson, 1932-33 Rotary International President***

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