

## Charley Gray – Nov. 7, 2025



Charles Thomas Gray, 73, of Beaverton, OR died of cancer on November 7, 2025.

Charles (Charley) was born in San Rafael, CA in 1952 to Thomas and Vivian Gray. When Charley saw the Buddy Rich Big Band Machine play in San Francisco as a teenager, he immediately knew that he wanted to be part of that world. What followed was a life rich in passion for music playing, writing, and arranging. While attending San Rafael High School, Charley enjoyed playing timpani in the Marin Symphony Youth Orchestra. He went on to attend Foothill College and then San Francisco State University, where he graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Music degree in 1974. Charley taught music in Marin County, all the while enjoying playing bass in a variety of groups. Reflecting on those gigs played and friends made brought him a comforting, nostalgic joy.

Beginning in 1980, Charley toured with the **Ice Capades as the conductor**, an adventure he cherished that allowed him to grow as a musician while making lifelong friends and exploring new places with his wife. After 6 years on the road, Charley attended North Texas State University, where he played in the Two O'Clock Band and earned a Master of Music degree in Jazz Composition in 1988.

Later that year, Charley was hired as Portland State University's Director of Jazz Studies where he built the program from the ground up, created the jazz studies bachelor's degree, co-created the jazz studies master's degree, and became a deeply committed mentor to every one of his students. During his years at PSU, Charley co-founded the Portland Jazz Orchestra for which he continued to write, arrange and conduct, traveled to Portland's sister city in Russia with a jazz ensemble, and was awarded the title of "Portland Jazz Master" in 2015. After 27 incredible years, Charley retired from PSU in 2015.

While Charley's calling was playing, writing, and arranging music, his greatest joy was his family. He never came home from a Tony and Tina's Wedding gig without cake for his wife and daughter, he brought his daughter into the orchestra pit of The Singing Christmas Tree on multiple occasions, and one of his proudest memories was playing Hello Dolly on guitar with his daughter on clarinet.

Outside of music, Charley enjoyed backpacking, tennis, and running (including 3 marathons). Later on, his days were happily filled with golf, reading, and traveling (mostly to the Oregon coast, with some amazing international trips in between). Charley's most beloved hobby, and the one that will likely be most missed, was cooking and baking for his friends and family. While it will never be quite the same, Charley's daughter is well on her way to perfecting his eggs benedict and lemon meringue pie.

Charley was preceded in death by his parents and sister, Susan Gray Mason, and is survived by his wife, Cathy, and their daughter Christine Parker (Gregory).

To celebrate the richness Charley brought to the Portland music community and beyond, family and

friends will gather for a memorial concert in his honor to be held on Sunday, March 22 at 12:30 pm at The Old Church in Portland.

For those wishing to honor Charley's legacy, the Gray family invites memorial contributions to the Charley Gray Jazz Award at Portland State University, which supports student musicians at PSU.

Donations may be made by emailing [give@psuf.org](mailto:give@psuf.org) or by mailing a check payable to PSU Foundation (please note "Charley Gray Jazz Award" in the memo line) to PSU Foundation, P.O. Box 243, Portland, OR 97207-0243.

To plant trees in memory, please visit the [Sympathy Store](#).

Published by The Oregonian from Feb. 4 to Feb. 8, 2026.