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Pittsburgh CLO's Van Kaplan to Step Down Organization Announces New Executive Producer

Pittsburgh, PA · May 20, 2021 – Pittsburgh CLO announced today that Van Kaplan, CEO, will be retiring from his position as the head of the 75-year-old arts organization in September 2021. Mr. Kaplan will remain as a consultant helping to oversee new projects and development opportunities.

The Executive Committee of Pittsburgh CLO's Board of Directors unanimously voted to elect Mark Fleischer as the next Executive Producer.

Board Chairman Helen Hanna Casey said, "Van has made an everlasting impact on the CLO. And he has held the longest tenure of any of our Executive Producers in the history of the organization. As we plan for our reopening and our 75th Anniversary Celebration in July, he leaves us well positioned for the future."

"It has been an honor serving as CLO's Executive Producer and CEO for the last 24 years," Kaplan said. "When I arrived here, the organization was a force of nature, and together with our staff, board, volunteers and widespread circle of supporters, we ran with that energy and dreamed up new ways to create. The arts express who we are and who we aspire to be. In all of our efforts I wanted to support opportunities for new talent and ignite new audiences, especially young people, and we have done that."

"This announcement is the successful culmination of a multiyear succession plan to select the next leader for this organization," said Casey. "Mark was hired in 2014 after a national search and has been co-leading the organization with his team and Van since the fall of 2019. He has worked closely with the Board over the last several years, and we look forward to what he will bring to the Pittsburgh CLO as our next Executive Producer."

Kaplan continued, "Over the past few years, and particularly in our partnership through the pandemic, it became clear that Mark was the right person to lead CLO into its next phase. With his leadership, we will put on a spectacular Summer Season this July at Heinz Field and a most celebratory Gala for CLO's 75th Anniversary."

In his 24 years as management and artistic leader, Van Kaplan was responsible for all aspects of the organization, the core of which was producing an annual subscription season of six Broadway musicals in the heart of the Cultural District at the 2,900 seat Benedum Center - Pittsburgh's largest theater. He went on to bring new visibility to the organization from its origins as a leading regional theater to producing involvement in 29 Broadway shows. Most became Pittsburgh Premieres in CLO's Summer Seasons. He

also guided the organization's involvement with productions in London's West End, Paris, Tokyo, Toronto and throughout the U.S. In 2004, he initiated and opened a year-round Cabaret theater for small musicals in downtown Pittsburgh in partnership with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. The same year, actor Jeff Goldblum starred in CLO's production of *The Music Man*, and Kaplan oversaw the making of a movie about Goldblum's experience, titled "Pittsburgh." The film debuted at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2006. In 2007, Kaplan assisted Disney Theatrical Productions in launching the National Tour of *Disney's High School Musical* in CLO's Summer Season.

Kaplan oversaw the organization's extensive educational programming at the CLO Academy of Musical Theater, and in 2009, in partnership with the Nederlander Organization, created the *National High School Musical Theatre Awards/Jimmy Awards®*, based on the CLO's *Gene Kelly Awards for Excellence in High School Musical Theater* (founded by his predecessor at CLO). This year marks the 30th anniversary of the *Gene Kelly Awards* and 12th anniversary of the *Jimmy Awards®*. Both programs will celebrate their milestones with upcoming virtual ceremonies. Kaplan produced a documentary series about the *Jimmy Awards®* titled "Broadway or Bust," which premiered on hundreds of PBS member stations and is still popular viewing under Arts & Music on PBS.org. The series explores the off-stage lives of America's top high school musical performers, including a student from the *Gene Kelly Awards*, on their quest for artistic excellence.

In 2015, Kaplan co-produced the Tony Award®-nominated Broadway production of *An American in Paris*. The musical had its world premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, and following Broadway, debuted in London, Tokyo, Pittsburgh and throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Initially hired in 2014 as Associate Artistic Director, Mr. Fleischer launched the Spark New Small Musicals Initiative funded by the organization's Next Generation Capital Campaign. The effort has resulted so far in the development of more than 15 new shows during the Spark Festival and New Musical Weekends including four World Premieres. In 2016, as part of Pittsburgh CLO's overall succession plan he was promoted to the position of Producing Director and more recently Executive Producer. He has since served as the line producer for all productions including oversight of the creation of new sets and costumes for the annual presentation of *A Musical Christmas Carol*. Fleischer has also played a substantial role with the organization's marketing and development efforts, helping to craft messaging about new initiatives and secure their funding. Fleischer hosts several community programs including Show Tune Saturday Night (open mic night at the Greer Cabaret) and Close Ups (streaming talk show). He serves on the Board of Directors and Educational Resources Committee of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT) and is a member of the Independent Presenter's Network (IPN).

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PITTSBURGH CLO has been a driving force behind the preservation, creation and promotion of live musical theater since 1946. As one of the largest regional musical theater organizations in the country, it is fortunate for the yearly support of nearly 200,000 audience members. In addition to producing fresh new productions of Broadway classics, the not-for-profit's mission is to develop new works and showcase emerging talent, and has been credited with launching the careers of numerous artists such as Billy Porter, Renée Elise Goldsberry, Rob Marshall, Kathleen Marshall, Rob Ashford, Bernadette Peters and Shirley Jones. The organization's dedication to musical theater extends beyond its six-show Summer Season at the Benedum Center to year-round programming at the 250-seat Cabaret Theater, which saw the world premieres of *Up and Away* and *Game On* in 2018 and *The Double-Threat Trio* in 2019. Its extensive education efforts include the Pittsburgh CLO Academy of Musical Theater; a university internship program; New Horizons, and in-school programs Gallery of Heroes and Creative Vision. Other ongoing initiatives include the Construction Center for the Arts, the Richard Rodgers Award, the *Gene Kelly Awards for Excellence in High School Musical Theater* and SPARK, a festival for new small-cast musicals launched in 2018. The organization also founded the *National High School Musical Theatre Awards/ Jimmy Awards®*. To further its mission to grow the art form, Pittsburgh CLO has been involved with 29 Broadway shows (32 Tony Awards®), and in 2014 produced the world premiere of *An American in Paris* in Paris, then on Broadway, where it won 4 Tony Awards®, and in London, Tokyo, Pittsburgh and throughout the U.S. and Europe. Pittsburgh CLO is the subject of a film starring Jeff Goldblum titled "Pittsburgh." pittsburghCLO.org.

Van Kaplan (CEO) joined Pittsburgh CLO as Executive Producer in 1997. In addition to overseeing the organization's year-round producing and programming efforts, he has produced or co-produced the Broadway productions of *The Lifespan of a Fact*, *American Son*, *An American in Paris*, Emilio and Gloria Estefan's *On Your Feet!*, *The Elephant Man* with Bradley Cooper, *Farinelli and the King* with Mark Rylance, *Evita*, *Catch Me If You Can*, Twyla Tharp's *Come Fly Away* and *The Addams Family*. He has produced touring productions of *Disney's The Little Mermaid*, *Camelot*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Phantom*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Chess*, *Grand Hotel*, *City of Angels*, *Evita*, *Brigadoon* and *Nunsense II*. He co-founded the *National High School Musical Theatre Awards / Jimmy Awards®*, and co-produced a three-part documentary series about the program that debuted on hundreds of PBS member stations, including its top markets. He is the director of the *Jimmy Awards®* on Broadway. Past directorial credits include *Guys and Dolls* with Victoria Clark; *She Loves Me*; *West Side Story* with Max von Essen and Ali Ewoldt; *Kopit & Yeston's Phantom*; *On the Town*; *Sweeney Todd*; *South Pacific* with Cathy Rigby; *Nunsense*; *Shear Madness*, *Ruthless!* and the regional premiere of Andrew Bovell's *Speaking in Tongues* at Pittsburgh's Quantum Theater. More recently he directed *You Say Tomato I Say Shut Up* across the country, and original shows for Caesars Entertainment at the Rio, Paris and Bally's Hotels in Las Vegas. He has consulted for the National Endowment for the Arts; is a former Theatre Panel chair for the Texas Commission on the Arts and served as adjunct professor for the Carnegie Mellon University Masters of Arts Management Program. Kaplan is a Board member of The Broadway League, serves on the Investment Committee of the Independent Presenters Network (IPN) and is a past president of The National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT). He is a lifetime Tony Awards® voter.

Mark Fleischer (Executive Producer) In addition to working as the line producer for CLO's Summer Season, Kara Cabaret Series and annual production of *A Musical Christmas Carol*, Mark launched the CLO's SPARK Festival initiative for new small musicals – a program made possible from the CLO's Next Generation Capital Campaign. Since its creation in 2017, the program has contributed to the development of more than 15 new musicals including the world premieres of *Up and Away* by Kevin Hammonds and Kristin Bair, *Game On* by Marcus Stevens and David Dabbon, *Beyond the Moon* by Joe Domencic and Christina McCann, and *The Double-Threat Trio* by Adam Overett. Prior to joining the CLO, Mark was the Producing Artistic Director for Adirondack Theatre Festival from 2007 – 2014 where he was named Regions Best Artistic Director by *Metroland in 2009* and Managing Artistic Director for Plano Repertory Theatre in suburban Dallas from 1993 – 2002. With a passion for new plays and musicals, he has led readings, residencies and world premiere productions for theatres across the country. He is a Board Member of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT) having also served on the organization's Educational Resources, New Musicals Festival, Fall and Spring Conference committees. He has served on grant review panels for both the New York and Texas State Council on the Arts. He has taught acting, theatre history and arts administration courses at SUNY Empire State College, Columbia College, and Collin College. Mark holds a BA in English Literature and Communication Arts from Austin College and an MFA in Directing from the Theatre School at DePaul University.

PITTSBURGH CLO

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