



The Wally Russell  
**FOUNDATION**

## PRESS RELEASE

February 10, 2020

**The Wally Russell Foundation  
Awards the 2020/2021 Lifetime Achievement Award to:  
Gary Fails**

GARY FAILS ANNOUNCED AS THE 2020/2021 "WALLY" LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT WINNER



**The Board of Directors of the Wally Russell Foundation is pleased to announce the winner of the 2020/2021 Lifetime Achievement Award is distinguished innovator, entrepreneur, and industry pioneer, Gary Fails.**

***To Promote Innovation & Leadership In The Entertainment Industry***

**Directors:** \* Phil Bernard \* David Cunningham \* Tom Folsom \* John Howe \* John Wiseman \* Paul Vincent  
Phil O'Donnell \* Richard Pilbrow \* Robert Bell \* Brian Russell \* Robert Schiller \* Jennifer White \* Peter Rogers \* Van Rommel

16458 Bolsa Chica Street, #221  
Huntington Beach, CA 92649  
[www.wallyfund.org](http://www.wallyfund.org)  
[wallyfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:wallyfoundation@gmail.com)



**The award will be presented at the annual USITT Conference and Exhibition in Houston, Texas at a breakfast celebration on April 3, 2020.**

Gary Fails is president of City Theatrical, the company he founded in 1986 in a South Bronx garage to create innovative lighting products and accessories. City Theatrical invents, manufactures, and customizes unique lighting accessories for the entertainment and architectural industries and has offices in Carlstadt, New Jersey and London, England. Products include Multiverse® wireless DMX/RDM systems, the multi award-winning DMXcat® Multi Function Test Tool, and QolorFLEX® brand of professional LED linear lighting, dimmers and accessories. These products and others are part of the industry's most extensive catalog of entertainment and architectural lighting accessories. City Theatrical also performs custom manufacturing services and designs and manufactures products on an OEM basis for other lighting manufacturers.

2021 will mark Gary's 50<sup>th</sup> year in professional lighting, a career that started when he dropped out of Columbia University and went on the road with Dance Theatre of Harlem as a teenager, first as a truck driver and later as an electrician, stage manager, and lighting designer. With DTH he completed numerous coast to coast US tours and 10 European tours before he was 25 years old. He also toured extensively as production electrician on first national tours of Broadway shows and in all spent 10 years on the road.

In 1980, Gary returned to New York City to become an IATSE Local One apprentice at Four Star Lighting in the South Bronx and spent his nights as a Local One electrician on Broadway, soon becoming the house electrician at Circle in the Square Theatre on West 50th St.

Gary's Local One apprenticeship allowed him to become a certified welder, licensed New York State laser operator, and also provided his training in sheet metal design and fabrication, all skills that he utilized to form City Theatrical. His routine for the first 10 years of City Theatrical was to work a full day at the company's South Bronx shop, then travel to midtown Manhattan to work on a Broadway show at night. Gary was production electrician for 28 Broadway shows, and had the unique opportunity to meet and work with nearly every Broadway designer of the time, often building products during the day to meet the needs of the designer he was working with at night. At its heart, City Theatrical's role is to create products that serve the needs of lighting professionals.

Several opportunities presented themselves for Gary and his growing team at City Theatrical in the early 1990s. The largest Broadway hit of its time, *Phantom of the Opera*, needed a better dry ice fogger to support important moments of the show and Gary developed the SS6000 Dry Ice Fogger from stainless steel, which soon became the standard of Broadway and the touring world and is still used on *Phantom* today.

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Temple TX. 76502  
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[wallyfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:wallyfoundation@gmail.com)



Upon seeing Source Four fixtures for the first time and realizing there were no beam control accessories for it, City Theatrical designed and produced a full range of accessories for designers. Today, many lighting manufacturers depend on City Theatrical to design and manufacture their lighting accessories.

In 1993, Gary attended the LDI Show as a visitor for the first time and realized that what City Theatrical had been doing for the New York lighting shops was also needed around the country, and around the world. Gary created a U.S. distribution network and expanded it to Europe and Asia. City Theatrical first exhibited at LDI in 1994, and won its first product award at the show, and since then has received over 40 business and innovation awards, including multiple product of the year awards in both the U.S. and Europe, the Crain's New York Magazine Small Business Award, and the New Jersey Small Manufacturer of the Year award.

In the early years of moving light development and at the request of Broadway designer Brian MacDevitt, Gary formed an engineering team to develop the AutoYoke®, a precision moving yoke designed to hold a Source Four that would give designers an incandescent sourced hard edge refocusable fixture, a niche that had not been filled in the moving light world, but which was of critical importance to Broadway designers. City Theatrical brought this fixture to market and the AutoYoke has played an important part in professional lighting for over 20 years.

In the early 2000s during the earliest days of the LED revolution, Gary formed a strategic alliance with Color Kinetics to produce the products and accessories that would allow Color Kinetics' architectural LED lighting products to transition to entertainment use. City Theatrical developed over 200 different accessories for Color Kinetics products including entertainment specific power/data supplies, beam control products, lenses, and hardware. These products enabled Color Kinetics to lead the LED lighting revolution in entertainment lighting.

Understanding the opportunity in the technology of wireless DMX, Gary worked with co-inventors Paul Kleissler, Larry Dunn, and Philip Nye to design and commercialize five generations of wireless DMX products over a 15-year period, creating an industry leading vision of a future lighting world in which every DMX device contains a small, inexpensive Multiverse wireless DMX/RDM receiver, leading to wireless systems of hundreds of fixtures and dozens of universes.

From working on productions such as *The Amazing Spiderman 2* and network television shows such as *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* and *Saturday Night Live*, Gary realized that entertainment designers needed linear LED products specific to our industry and created the QolorFLEX brand of LED tape and dimmers which has grown to be an industry leader found on hundreds of Broadway and West End shows, films, and network television shows.

Gary is a 40-year member of IATSE Local One and an instructor in their technology training program, an ETCP certified electrician, and an MBA graduate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Business. He is a member of the Advisory Board to the Entertainment

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Technology program at the New York City College of Technology and is a Board member of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program which advises and aids New Jersey manufacturers.

For over 20 years, City Theatrical has utilized an innovative open book management system in which the company shares business and financial information with employees in a monthly meeting, and encourages the creation of profit with the philosophy that “those who create the profits should share in those profits.” City Theatrical shares 20% of after-tax profits with the highly skilled and experienced staff and craftspeople who have designed and built thousands of products and projects over the years.

Gary is married to Broadway actress Terri Klausner. They live in New York and have three children, Greta, Joseph, and Michael. In his spare time Gary has run 12 marathons, and builds acoustic guitars.

The Wally Russell Foundation was created in 1992 to celebrate the vision and life of Wally Russell, a true mentor to the industry. For 29 years, the Foundation has been supporting Lighting Interns for the Canadian Opera Company and the Los Angeles Opera in his memory. For further information regarding the activities of the Wally Russell Foundation including:

**The Wally Russell Lifetime Achievement Award**  
**The Wally Russell Lighting Intern Program at the Los Angeles Opera**  
**The Wally Russell Foundation/USITT Annual Mentoring Award,**

**or**

To contribute to the Wally Foundation, please contact:

Tom Folsom  
Chairman  
The Wally Russell Foundation  
3809 S. General Bruce Drive  
Suite 103-360  
Temple, TX. 76502

714-699-3573

[wallyfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:wallyfoundation@gmail.com)

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## Wally Award Winners

- 2020/2021** – Gary Fails
- 2018/2019** – Steve Terry
- 2017/2018** – David Higgins
- 2015/2016** – Gordon Pearlman
- 2013/2014** – Jules Fisher
- 2012** – Imero Fiorentino
- 2011** – Rusty Brutche
- 2010** – Dave Cunningham
- 2009** – Joel Rubin
- 2008** – Richard Pilbrow
- 2007** – Fred Foster
- 2006** – Allen Branton
- 2005** – Richard Belliveau
- 2004** – George Izenour
- 2003** – Sonny Sonnenfeld
- 2002** – Jimmy Fuller
- 2001** – Jim Bornhorst
- 2000** – Stan Miller
- 1999** – Don Stern
- 1998** – Bran Ferren
- 1997** – Fred Bentham
- 1996** – Francis DeVerna
- 1995** – Tharon Musser
- 1994** – George van Buren
- 1993** – Charles Altman
  
- 1992** – Wally Russell

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