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Audience of 6,200 closes out the 40th season of Spoleto Festival USA at the Wells Fargo Festival Finale at Middleton Place

Finale caps a season that saw record ticket sales for the 17-day international performing arts festival

JUNE 13, 2016 (CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA)—A rousing concert by Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats, a hot summer’s day, and a dazzling fireworks display drew a capacity audience of 6,200 to Middleton Place on Sunday bringing this year’s Spoleto Festival USA to a celebratory close. The Wells Fargo Festival Finale that is held annually at the historic plantation and gardens capped the 40th season of the 17-day international performing arts festival held in Charleston from May 27 through June 12. This year’s Festival achieved record box office receipts of $4.364 million and attracted an audience of 84,309 from the local tri-county area and from 49 states.

The 2016 season heralded the Spoleto Festival USA’s return into the Charleston Gaillard Center after a three-year renovation. To mark the occasion the Festival presented a new production of *Porgy and Bess* by George Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin in honor of a 1970 production held in the former Gaillard Auditorium. The 1970 production was the first time the opera had been
performed in Charleston—the city in which the story was written and is set—and a landmark occasion in the city's race relations. The new and first Spoleto Festival USA production that was directed by David Herskovits, visually designed by artist Jonathan Green, and conducted by Stefan Asbury proved to be extraordinarily popular in the city of its origin with tickets to all six performances selling out in just two weeks. The production sparked a city-wide celebration of *Porgy and Bess* including a simulcast and rebroadcast of the Memorial Day performance onto large screens in public spaces in downtown Charleston and West Ashley that were free to attend. A project called The Porgy Houses took Green’s visual designs off the stage and into the streets to highlight the city’s African-American heritage. The Festival also offered a *Porgy and Bess* walking tour. Other organizations offering *Porgy and Bess*-related exhibitions and activities included the Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston Library Society, The Charleston Museum, and the College of Charleston Friends of the Library and Special Collections. Several of these exhibitions will continue beyond the Festival.

Of the 40th season program, *Musical Toronto* noted: “Charleston, South Carolina is one of the premier travel destinations in the world, and its hotels and restaurants are packed year-round, but for the annual Spoleto Festival, everything is kicked up a notch. This year, the 40th-anniversary of this continually challenging and surprising celebration of the arts, both the performances and the venues aimed to top everything that had come before.”

In addition to *Porgy and Bess* the opera program included the US premiere of Helmut Lachenmann’s *The Little Match Girl*, the US premiere of a revision of Antoine Dauvergne’s 1753 opéra comique, *La Coquette trompée* called *La Double Coquette*, and the world premiere of an operetta called *Afram ou La Belle Swita* by Charleston composer Edmund Thornton Jenkins 90 years after his death.

The operas received international and national press attention. Of *Porgy and Bess*, *The New York Times* said: “It took 40 years, but the Spoleto Festival USA has finally claimed its birthright, George Gershwin’s opera *Porgy and Bess*, and done it in high style. On Friday evening, the festival opened a beautiful new production with an excellent cast and striking visual design by Jonathan Green in the resplendently renovated Charleston Gaillard Center.” *The Telegraph* of London described the production as “...
momentous and triumphant homecoming for *Porgy and Bess.*" *The Charlotte Observer* called the production “... the most impressive large-scale opera in my 33 visits to Spoleto Festival USA." Of the cast, *The Financial Times* said: “As Clara, Courtney Johnson established the evening’s high level of vocalism at the outset with a “Summertime” sung with rounded tone and a languid legato. Lester Lynch’s powerful baritone signified Porgy’s unexpected physical strength ... Alyson Cambridge, singing opulently, was compelling visually and vocally as Bess ...” The opera also generated hometown pride with *The Post and Courier* writing “This Catfish Row is beautiful, its residents proud, complicated people. They are not immune to violence and injustice, of course, but they do not permit injustice to dictate their fate.” The opera and simulcast were also featured in a news story that aired nationally on *PBS NewsHour.*

The US premiere of Lachenmann’s 2002 work he calls “music with Images,” *The Little Match Girl,* was co-directed by Mark Down and Phelim McDermott and conducted by John Kennedy. It was performed in the Memminger Auditorium with the 108 members of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra on raised platforms that surrounded the audience. *The New York Times* said: “John Kennedy, with much of the music happening behind him in a surround configuration, conducted the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra and the Westminster Choir in a logistical tour de force. The sopranos Heather Buck and Yuko Kakuta were similarly adept in their vocal gymnastics ...” *Classical Voice America* noted: “Lachenmann’s magnum opus is a challenging and discomfiting work for listeners. Spoleto Festival’s imaginative new production did much to help the audience comprehend the composer’s conception.” Lachenmann’s music was also featured in Music In Time series programming, including a concert in which the composer himself spoke with director and host John Kennedy.

Another American premiere presented at the Festival was *La Double Coquette,* from *La Coquette trompée* by Antoine Dauvergne with additions by contemporary composer Gérard Pesson and libretto by Charles-Simon Favart with additions by Pierre Alferi performed by Ensemble Amarillis in the Dock Street Theatre. *The Wall Street Journal* described it as “... a witty playful piece that subtly translated the naughty, transgressive character of the original into a modern context.” *ArtsAtl* (Atlanta) said: the real satisfaction of *Coquette* lies in the score, its late-Baroque sequences interlaid with everything from Romantic (Mahler is quoted) to Latin Jazz. Of the three singers, Isabelle
Poulenard was especially persuasive, with a riveting portrayal that was both touching and wry."

Presented in the Woolfe Street Playhouse in the style of a Parisian cabaret revue, the world premiere of operetta *Afram ou La Belle Swita* provided the Festival with a direct lineage to Charleston’s musical history. Born in Charleston, Edmund Thornton Jenkins was the seventh son of the famed Reverend Daniel Jenkins who started the Jenkins Orphanage in the city that in turn spawned the Jenkins Orphanage Bands. Edmund Thornton Jenkins studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and lived in Paris, where he wrote *Afram*. Dying at age 32 in 1926, Jenkins never saw his work staged. The Spoleto Festival USA production featured singers from *Porgy and Bess* and was directed by David Herskovits with musical direction by Duane Davis. The production featured the grand-nephew of Jenkins, Tuffus Zimbabwe, on piano. Zimbabwe, who is the keyboardist for the *Saturday Night Live* band, also performed as Jasbo Brown in *Porgy and Bess*.

The theater program featured a return visit from Dublin’s Gate Theatre with its new production of Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* directed by Patrick Mason. *The Post and Courier* said: "... Wilde would, with Victorian relish, approve of the Gate’s production, which gorgeously, charmingly lulls you in, then brilliantly knocks you off kilter from the force of your own irrepressible laughter." Also making its return to the Festival was innovative UK company 1927 that presented the US premiere of *Golem* that blends live action, live music, and sophisticated animated projections. *Charleston City Paper* declared *Golem* to be “... the most visually interesting thing you’ll see at Spoleto.” Intimate theater experiences were offered by acclaimed one-man shows *A Gambler’s Guide to Dying* performed by Gary McNair in the Emmett Robinson Theatre and *Every Brilliant Thing* performed by Jonny Donohoe as part of the American Express Woolfe Street Playhouse series. Chicago’s Manual Cinema made its Spoleto Festival USA debut with *Ada/Ava*, a shadow puppet-driven piece that has been nominated for a 2016 Drama Desk Award in the Unique Theatrical Experience category.

A keynote address by Co-founder and Artistic Director Bill T. Jones and a performance by dancers from the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company at the Festival’s Opening Ceremonies heralded the company’s return to the Festival. The company performed one
of its signature works *D-Man in the Waters* and a 2013 work *Story*/ in the Sottile Theatre. New to the Festival was L.A. Dance Project that performed a program of works choreographed by Justin Peck, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and Benjamin Millepied in the Charleston Gaillard Center. The Gaillard was also where *Havana Rakatan* by Sadler’s Wells and Congas Productions brought a burst of Cuban exuberance to Festival audiences featuring a live band on stage and colorful, fast-paced dancing that had many attendees dancing in the streets post-performances. Meanwhile in Memminger Auditorium, Amy O’Neal’s B-Boys and DJ WD4D challenged gender roles in *Opposing Forces*. The dance program also featured the Aakash Odedra Company’s acclaimed work *Rising* featuring Odedra performing four solo works by a who’s who of choreographers: Akram Khan, Russell Maliphant, and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, alongside a work of his own.

The new Charleston Gaillard Center provided opportunities for orchestral and choral showcases, beginning opening weekend with a joyous 40th-Season Celebration Concert conducted by Steven Sloane. Guest performers included soprano Jennifer Check, tenor Victor Ryan Robertson, mezzo-soprano Sandra Piques Eddy, jazz vocalist René Marie, and chamber music series musicians Geoff Nuttall, Peter Kolkay, James Austin Smith, and Christopher Costanza. The evening was hosted by Mayor Joseph P. Riley who spoke of the Festival’s origins, and to whom the world premiere of *blessing the boats* composed by John Kennedy was dedicated. The varied program featured an aria from *The Saint of Bleecker Street* by Festival founder Gian Carlo Menotti alongside Stravinsky’s *Firebird Suite* and Strauss’s “Dance of the Seven Veils” from *Salome* and a selection of arias. The Westminster Choir conducted by Joe Miller provided what *The New York Times* called “. . . a stunning moment, singing Stephen Paulus’s a cappella "Hymn to the Eternal Flame" with the singers angelically deployed in the top balcony on either side."

The Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra and Westminster Choir combined with the Charleston Symphony Orchestra Chorus for a powerful demonstration of musical force at the *Choral Fantasy* concert conducted by Joe Miller. The program featured two Beethoven works, *Mass in C Major*, op. 86 and his *Fantasia in C Minor*, op. 80 performed with soloists Jennifer Check, Olivia Sue Greene, Avery Amereau, Rolando Sanz, Thomas Lynch, and Matthew Anchel with pianist Lori Sims performing the
Fantasia. In between the Beethoven works the orchestra and Lori Sims performed Messiaen’s *Couleurs de la Cité céleste*, showcasing various percussion elements. Orchestra members’ talents were also showcased at a Chamber Orchestra Concert conducted by Norman Huynh in the St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in a program of works by Villa Lobos, Steve Reich, Ibert, and Ginastera. *The Post and Courier* reported: “. . . soloists and ensemble performed with impeccable musicianship, leaving the sanctuary of St. Matthew’s ringing with a warm afterglow of sound, disrupted quickly by enthusiastic accolades from the full church pews.”

This season opportunity provided programming inspiration for the Director of Choral Activities Joe Miller and the Director of Orchestral Activities and Resident Conductor John Kennedy. When he discovered that within this year’s choir there was an accomplished bluegrass band, Joe Miller programmed a concert around a traditional mountain song “Angel Band,” providing the musicians to perform on banjo, guitar, electric bass, and violin during the popular Westminster Choir concerts in the Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul. The rich program also featured several works by Poulenc and *Trois Chansons de Charles d’Orleans* by Debussy. *The Post and Courier* described the performance as “. . . a full-immersion concert of mostly a cappella vocal music that delivered a sensory experience difficult to forget. Rarely does one get a chance to experience the sublime.” Meanwhile, the large orchestra and abundance of percussion required for *The Little Match Girl* gave John Kennedy the opportunity to program Steve Reich’s 1976 master work *Music for 18 Musicians* that was performed by orchestra members in the Memminger Auditorium. Musically directed by Kennedy and pianist Stephen Drury, *The Post and Courier* said: “. . . the work piles layer upon layer of repeating rhythmic loops, filling every nook and cranny of Memminger with pulsing shimmering sound.”

This season *Classical Voice North America* wrote: “Over the past decade, John Kennedy has become one of today’s most influential new music conductors . . .” and his passion for contemporary music extended beyond the podium and into the Simons Center Recital Hall and Woolfe Street Playhouse with the adventurous Music In Time series. Works performed included *Verpflichtet II* by orchestra member and composer Gleb Kanasevich, the premiere of Kennedy’s own *Spoletudes*, and contemporary master works *Ancient Voices of Children* by George Crumb and Thomas Albert’s *A Maze (With
Grace) alongside newer works by Oscar Bettison, Hong-Da Chin, Richard Reed Parry, Julie Barwick, and Ryan Brown.

Declaring at the opening concert that out of the 40 seasons of Spoleto Festival USA, *this* was the best Bank of America Chamber Music series to attend, director and host Geoff Nuttall set the scene for a spectacular run of 11 diverse chamber programs performed over 33 concerts. Nuttall’s ensemble the St. Lawrence String Quartet was in residence for the duration of the Festival and the series featured numerous works by composer-in-residence Osvaldo Golijov, including the world premiere of “Drag Down the Sky” that is from the final scene of the first act of his forthcoming opera *Iphigenia*. The work was performed by baritone Tyler Duncan and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. Golijov’s *Anniversary Bagatelles* were also premiered during the Festival and his work *Tenebrae*, commissioned by the Festival and premiered in 2002, was performed with countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo singing the role written for soprano. Costanzo performed in the opening two programs in his series debut. Returning artists included pianist Inon Barnatan, violinist Benjamin Beilman, baritone Tyler Duncan, bassoonist Peter Kolkay, double bassist Anthony Manzo, pianist Pedja Muzijevic, flutist Tara Helen O’Connor, clarinetist Todd Palmer, violinist/violist Daniel Phillips, pianist Stephen Prutsman, oboist James Austin Smith, violinist Livia Sohn, the St. Lawrence String Quartet, and cellist Alisa Weilerstein. In a review of the performances featuring Anthony Roth Costanzo, *The Charlotte Observer* stated: “And that’s why we go to Spoleto: To have our eyes and ears snapped open. . . You may sail through totally uncharted waters, but the voyage is a joy.”

In the popular music realm, the Festival was boisterously launched with two concerts by Old Crow Medicine Show in the College of Charleston Cistern Yard with Americana singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile performing a Memorial Day concert in the TD Arena. The Wells Fargo Jazz Series also opened in the TD Arena with two concerts by Arturo O’Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra. The concerts were moved from the College of Charleston Cistern Yard owing to a tropical storm but rain did not dampen the enthusiasm for O’Farrill and the 18-piece band. Also taking place on opening weekend were concerts by the Bohemian Trio that provided the opportunity for the Festival to present a talk on Cuban music called “The Conversation Continues: The US, Cuba, and
Jazz” featuring Yosvany Terry from the trip and Arturo O’Farrill, moderated by Larry Blumenfeld.

The jazz series also featured two musical titans, NEA Jazz Master Randy Weston who brought his African Rhythms Sextet to the Charleston Gaillard Center, and Freddy Cole who performed eight concerts in the Simons Center Recital Hall with his quartet. Described by the Charleston Chronicle as “part history teacher and part cultural griot”, the paper said “Mr. Weston and the rest of the African Rhythms Sextet literally astounded the audience with their African influenced sound.” Hailed by South Carolina ETV Radio as “one of the best male jazz singers of his generation.” Freddy Cole was as equally embraced by audiences, The Post and Courier declaring: “The passion with which Cole plays his songs has not faded, and it likely never will.”

Concerts performed in the College of Charleston Cistern Yard as part of the Wells Fargo Jazz series included a warmly welcomed return to Spoleto Festival USA by 2016 Grammy Award winner Cécile McLorin Salvant while Jason Moran brought his lively Fats Waller Dance Party to the oak-lined outdoor space. The series also featured René Marie in the Charleston Gaillard Center whose powerful performance opened with the world premiere of a Spoleto Festival USA-commissioned song, Be the Change, that Marie wrote as a call to action in the wake of the shooting of nine people at Charleston’s Emanuel AME church last year. Charleston’s Art Mag described the impact on the audience as “... leaving us feeling moved and hopeful.”

Commemorating the Emanuel Nine and also reflecting on this particular moment in America’s history formed the foundation for the world premiere of Grace Notes: Reflections for Now written, directed, and performed by renowned photographer and video artist Carrie Mae Weems. Weems marshalled an esteemed group of African-American singers (Eisa Davis, Alicia Hall Moran, and Imani Uzuri), poets (Aja Monet and Carl Hancock Rux), dancers (Francesca Harper and the Brothers of the Tau Eta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha), and a jazz band (Geri Allen, Craig Harris, Jawwaad Taylor, Calvin Jones, and Curtis Norwosad) to perform her meditation on grace and its role in democracy. Interspersed with monologues by Weems and featuring her photography and video work, The Post and Courier commented “... the profusion of artistic
resources at play in the work — overflowing the work, even — shows the power that fuels the hope at the heart of Weems’ work."

“Having all of the performance spaces we use at full capacity this year and marking our 40th season inspired a robust and celebratory program,” said General Director Nigel Redden. “Achieving record ticket sales is very gratifying but a considerable amount of additional fundraising was required in order to present this program and also to fund projects such as the simulcast and The Porgy Houses. Although we do not have final figures yet, given the significant expense of the 2016 festival we are trying hard to balance the budget. We certainly hope to do so and appreciate the tremendous support from our sponsors and many supporters in helping us to make the 40th season so memorable.”

The 2017 Spoleto Festival USA will take place May 26 through June 11. The season will be announced in January. For more information about Spoleto Festival USA, please visit spoletousa.org or call 843.722.2764.

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