

Note: Images are available in the [online media gallery](#).

## SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

2020

PRESS RELEASE

# Spoletto Festival USA Announces Unprecedented Cancellation of Its 2020 Season

In compliance with civil authorities and guidelines for health and safety to stop the spread of COVID-19, the annual performing arts festival will not take place.

**March 24, 2020 (Charleston, South Carolina)** — For 43 years, Spoleto Festival USA has gathered artists of all kinds, turning Charleston, South Carolina, into a cultural haven—a place where opera, dance, theater, and music converge for a 17-day celebration of artistic innovation and tradition. The 2020 season, originally scheduled to take place May 22 to June 7, was slated to feature world premieres and surprising creations—not least its landmark commissioned opera, *Omar*; the highly anticipated romantic comedy from director Emma Rice, *Romantics Anonymous*; and a unique pairing of Gesualdo’s *Responsoria* with modern American photography. Yet after monitoring the spread of COVID-19 and operating in compliance with recommendations of health organizations and civil authorities, Spoleto Festival USA will cancel its 2020 Festival. For the first time in the Festival’s history, General Director Nigel Redden announced the unprecedented cancellation. “2020 promised to be an exceptional year for Spoleto Festival USA,” he said. “*Omar*, the new opera by Rhiannon Giddens with co-composer Michael Abels, was set to open our celebration of the 350th anniversary of Charleston’s founding by remembering an African scholar who was sold here in 1807 and penned his autobiography in 1831. Bank of America Chamber Music’s composer-in-residence Jessica Meyer was creating a world premiere for the Dock Street Theatre stage, while artists from South Africa, New Orleans, and beyond were set to arrive for concerts in the Wells Fargo Jazz series. Ticket sales had already broken records. But to continue plans in the face of COVID-19 would be irresponsible to our artists, audience members, volunteers, and staff, and to Charleston itself. We will be ready to celebrate the arts and Charleston again in 2021 when we all hope our world returns to normal.”

Spoletto Festival USA was established as an international gathering of the performing arts—a place where established artists, emerging talents, and arts enthusiasts from all corners of the world converge for a singular experience. In a typical season, Spoleto welcomes ticket holders from an average of 49 states and 16 countries, and the 2020 season lineup featured artists from 10 countries worldwide.

This spring, many technical staff members were scheduled to arrive as early as April 20, with several artists arriving April 27 and more on May 11—dates falling well within the CDC’s guidelines against mass gatherings. The Festival’s regard for health and safety remain paramount, and it is taking these guidelines seriously.

In the immediate days and weeks ahead, Festival staff will be contacting all who have already purchased tickets to the 2020 season. All ticket holders will receive a full credit to their Spoleto accounts for use on any future Festival purchase; a value which will never expire. In addition, ticket holders may choose to donate the value of their tickets to the Festival as a tax-deductible contribution or elect to receive a full or partial refund. Please note that Festival staff is operating remotely, and there may be slight delays in response time as we work to address all messages received. We ask for the public’s continued patience as our team navigates this process and grapples with next steps.

Throughout history, performing arts institutions like Spoleto have offered a respite from crisis through community. The Festival fully realizes the financial ramifications that cancelling places on ticket buyers and artists, as well as on local businesses and the hospitality industry. Spoleto takes great pride in having contributed to Charleston’s growth, economy, and cultural standing in the Southeast, and endeavors to maintain that commitment in order to help the city flourish again.

The 45th season of Spoleto Festival USA will take place May 28 to June 13, 2021, in Charleston, South Carolina.

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## Spoleto Festival USA

Founded in 1977, Spoleto Festival USA is an annual 17-day performing arts festival in Charleston, SC, that presents leading artists in classical and popular music, opera, jazz, dance, and theater. The 2021 season takes place May 28 to June 13 in various locations on the downtown peninsula, including the historic Dock Street Theatre and the Charleston Gaillard Center. Spoleto Festival USA is a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization.

### Leadership

**Nigel Redden**, Spoleto Festival USA General Director | [Bio](#)

**John Kennedy**, Resident Conductor and Director of Orchestral Activities | [Bio](#)

**Joe Miller**, Director of Choral Activities | [Bio](#)

**Geoff Nuttall**, The Charles E. and Andrea L. Volpe Director of Chamber Music | [Bio](#)

# SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

spoletousa.org

## Spoletto Festival USA Orchestra

Assembled anew each year through nationwide auditions, the Festival's resident ensemble accompanies each season's opera selections and symphonic concerts. Smaller ensembles participate in choral, chamber, and contemporary music performances. The Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra works closely with Resident Conductor and Director Orchestral Activities John Kennedy as well as guest conductors and composers. Learn more [here](#).

## Images

A selection of high resolution images can be found in Spoleto Festival USA's [online gallery](#).

For more information, visit the [press room](#).