

# SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

Overview



**Spoleto Festival USA** is a 17-day international performing arts festival in Charleston, South Carolina, that presents leading artists in opera, theater, dance, and music.

**Our Story** — In the 1970s, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Gian Carlo Menotti was in search for a new city to host the American counterpart to the annual Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, which he had founded in 1958 as a forum for young American artists in Europe. Hoping to find a city that would offer similar charms as well as Italy's wealth of theaters, churches, and other performance spaces, Menotti settled on Charleston, South Carolina, relishing its intimacy, enchantment, and, in his words, "unique beauty." Championed by a young Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. and College of Charleston's then-president Theodore Stern, Spoleto Festival USA held its inaugural season in 1977.

Since then, Spoleto Festival USA has established itself as America's premier performing arts festival. For 17 days and nights beginning the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, Spoleto fills Charleston with renowned artists and emerging performers in disciplines including opera, theater, dance, and a wide range of music—from symphonic and chamber to choral, jazz, and folk. The Festival produces its own operas, specializing in rarely performed masterpieces by well-known composers, American premieres, and traditional works presented in new ways. In 2022 the Festival presents its fourth commissioned world premiere opera, *Omar*.

**"IT WILL NOT BE LIKE MOST FESTIVALS. . . BUT A UNIQUE AND FERTILE GROUND FOR THE YOUNG, AND A DIGNIFIED HOME FOR THE MASTERS."**

— Gian Carlo Menotti on his founding vision for Spoleto Festival USA in 1977

As its core mission, Spoleto Festival USA presents programs of the highest artistic caliber while maintaining a dedication to young artists, a commitment to all forms of the performing arts, a passion for contemporary innovation, and an enthusiasm for providing unusual opportunities for established artists. The Festival is proud to provide young performers the opportunity to work with master artists, conductors, directors, designers, and performers. Illustrious artists who performed early in their careers at Spoleto Festival USA include Renée Fleming, Emanuel Ax, Joshua Bell, Yo-Yo Ma, and Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

But more than a launching pad for young talent, Spoleto has also served as a catalyst for cultural change, aiding in Charleston's flourishing as a top destination. With help from the city and generous donors, Spoleto has spearheaded the renovations of numerous performance spaces: Festival Hall, Dock Street Theatre, College of Charleston Sottile Theatre, and the Charleston Gaillard Center.

**"SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA PUT CHARLESTON ON THE MAP"** — *The Post and Courier*

# SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

Facts and Figures



**“OUR FESTIVAL NEVER TRIES TO BE DIDACTIC OR OPERATE WITH A FIXED FORMULA. WE LOVE TO IMPROVISE. SPOLETO IS A *BOÎTE AUX SURPRISES*—A SURPRISE PACKAGE.”**

— Spoleto Festival USA founder Gian Carlo Menotti

**1977:** The inaugural season of Spoleto Festival USA

Each season runs **17** days and nights beginning the Friday of Memorial Day weekend.

Attendance numbers **60,000** to **70,000** annually.

**50%** of Spoleto Festival USA audience members are from outside of Charleston.

On average, attendees travel from **49** states and **16** countries.

During the Festival, Charleston sees an economic impact of approximately **\$42,700,000**.

The Festival employs more than **500** full-time, part-time, and seasonal staffers, including:

**80** musicians for the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra.

**60** apprentices in arts administration and production.

Additionally, Spoleto engages **450** seasonal volunteers who donate their time.

**\$8,500,000:** the Festival’s annual operating budget

In a typical season, Spoleto mounts **150** performances in more than **10** venues.

Spoleto has produced and/or presented **20** opera, dance, and theater world premieres, including:

Tennessee Williams’s *Creve Coeur*; Arthur Miller’s *The American Clock*; Laurie Anderson’s *Empty Places*; Urban Bush Women’s *Praise House*; Philip Glass’s *Hydrogen Jukebox*; Lee Breuer’s *Lulu Noire*; Huang Ruo’s *Paradise Interrupted*; Carrie Mae Weems’s *Grace Notes: Reflections for Now*; Ayodele Casel’s *While I Have the Floor*

**“SPOLETO’S LINEUP IS ALWAYS TANTALIZINGLY DIVERSE AND TALENT-PACKED”**

— *Departures*



**“THE ORCHESTRA, CULLED FROM ADVANCED CONSERVATORY STUDENTS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS THROUGH NATIONWIDE AUDITIONS, STILL STRIKES ME AS THE BEST AMERICAN ORCHESTRA OF ITS KIND.” — *American Record Guide***

**Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra** — Central to the Festival’s success each season, the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra is one of the country’s most prestigious ensembles for young professional musicians. As the orchestra in residence for Spoleto Festival USA, the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra accompanies Spoleto’s opera selections and symphonic concerts, and smaller ensembles are selected to participate in choral, chamber, and contemporary performances.

Assembled anew each year through nationwide auditions, the Festival’s Orchestra takes on a dynamic new identity with the participation of both returning and new musicians. (The Orchestra comprises roughly 80 ensemble members; the precise number fluctuates depending on the works performed in a given season.) Each musician is selected for his or her skill, artistry, and versatility, and the resulting group of talented and diverse young professionals is consistently lauded in the press. Resident Conductor and Director of Orchestral Activities John Kennedy leads the audition process.

**“THE ORCHESTRA IS COMPRISED OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS JUST STARTING THEIR CAREERS, BUT THE TALENT ASSEMBLED HERE WAS JUST ASTONISHING.” — *Musical Toronto***

During their residency, the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra members work closely with Kennedy as well as numerous guest conductors and composers. In recent seasons, guests have included Steven Sloane, Michael Gordon, Evan Rogister, Michelle Rofrano, Lidiya Yankovskaya, Liza Lim, Stefan Asbury, Anne Manson, Helmut Lachenmann, Norman Huynh, Duane Davis, Huang Ruo, William Eddins, Michael Nyman, Joseph Young, and Aik Khai Pung.

Alumni of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra can be found in almost every professional orchestra in the United States including the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, The Philadelphia Orchestra, and The Metropolitan Opera.

**“IT’S REPETITIVE TO POINT OUT JUST HOW FANTASTIC THE SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA ORCHESTRA IS, BUT EACH PERFORMANCE IS AS GOOD—IF NOT BETTER—THAN THE ONE BEFORE IT.”**

— *The Post and Courier*

# SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

## Leadership



Nigel Redden



John Kennedy



Geoff Nuttall



Joe Miller

**Nigel Redden, General Director**, rejoined Spoleto Festival USA in 1995 after having previously served as the Festival's general manager from 1986 to 1991. As general director, he is responsible for all aspects of the Festival, including programming, fundraising, financial administration, marketing, union negotiations, artists' contracts, board development, and community relations. Redden has also served as director of the Lincoln Center Festival and the executive director of the Santa Fe Opera as well as artistic consultant to Philadelphia's American Music Theater Festival and consultant to the chairperson of the New York International Festival of the Arts. He was director of the National Endowment for the Arts' Dance Program and has served on various NEA panels. Redden is president of the Spaulding-Paolozzi Foundation and serves on the board of Druid Theatre. He was awarded the Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters in 2001.

**John Kennedy, Resident Conductor and Director of Orchestral Activities**, made his Spoleto debut as a member of the Festival Orchestra in 1983. He conducted his first Spoleto opera in 2006 and has served as Director of Orchestral Activities since 2011. In recent seasons, Kennedy has conducted operas by leading composers of our time including Francesconi, Glass, Lachenmann, Lim, and Huang Ruo. Kennedy also auditions and selects each member of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra. Especially noted for his interpretations of contemporary music, Kennedy has worked with many of the leading composers of our time in over 300 premieres and numerous recordings. He is the composer of more than 90 works, including opera, orchestral, chamber, and experimental works that have been performed throughout the world. In 2021, Kennedy conducts the world premiere of *Omar*.

**Geoff Nuttall, The Charles E. and Andrea L. Volpe Director of Chamber Music**, began playing the violin at age 8 after moving to Ontario from Texas. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto, where he studied under Lorand Fenyves. In 1989, Nuttall co-founded the St. Lawrence String Quartet, and has played more than 2,000 concerts around the world. He is now on faculty at Stanford University, where the SLSQ has been ensemble in residence since 1999, and makes his home in Portola Valley, California, with his wife Livia Sohn and sons, Jack and Ellis. The 2020 season marks Nuttall's 11th season as chamber series director.

**Joe Miller, Director of Choral Activities**, has served in this capacity at Spoleto Festival USA since 2007. From 2006 to 2020, he also served as the director of choral activities at Westminster Choir College and director of the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir. Miller has collaborated with some of the world's leading orchestras and conductors. Recent seasons have included performances with the Philharmoniker Berliner and Sir Simon Rattle; The Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin; and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela and Gustavo Dudamel. In 2020, Miller was named a Professor of Choral Studies/Chair of Choral Studies at the College-Conservatory of Music at University of Cincinnati.

Find Spoleto Festival USA's [Board of Directors here](#).

# SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

Community



**Spoletto ETC (Engaging the Community)** — Spoleto Festival USA was founded with a mission to pair young artists with established masters and provide a fertile ground for experimentation, exploration, and artistic learning. This vision, however, extends far beyond the concert stages and opera houses. Vital to the Festival’s endurance are its endeavors to engage audiences across a broad spectrum. With programming that includes sending Spoleto artists into schools, inviting students into our theaters, holding public discussion series, and organizing master classes and workshops for budding artists, the Festival aims to spark connections and leave a lasting impression on the next generation of artists and arts lovers. Spoleto ETC comprises three avenues:

**Tailored education programs for students** to instill artistic curiosity and inspire audiences of the future. This avenue includes **artists visiting area schools**, such as Bank of America Chamber Music artists performing at Sanders-Clyde Creative Arts and Memminger Elementary, as well as **students visiting Festival venues** for special performances. Spoleto artists also **work with student-focused organizations** outside of schools, such as the Charleston Jazz Academy, Charleston Symphony Youth Orchestra, and College of Charleston’s arts management program.

**Community engagement programs** that encourage participation and remove barriers. This avenue includes free discussions before the Festival (like the **Salon Series** and **Exploring Omar**) as well as Artist Talks during the Festival (**Conversations With** and **Jazz Talks**) that aim to illuminate elements of the season from various perspectives. Programs also include Spoleto’s **Open Stage Door**—providing more than 800 complimentary tickets each season to area community-based nonprofit organizations—and **Azure Concerts**, performances designed specifically for individuals who are on the autism spectrum or have similar challenges.

**Programs for professional advancement** to aid in the development of young artists and arts administrators. This avenue includes the **Spoletto Festival USA Orchestra**, the Festival’s resident ensemble, as well as Spoleto’s **apprentice program**, a short-term internship opportunity for college-age students interested in acquiring hands-on experiences in such fields as artist services, box office, development, finance, media relations, orchestra operations, and production.

In 2020, several Spoleto ETC endeavors, including workshops and conversations with artists, moved to a digital format, subsequently broadening Spoleto’s reach. Going forward, the Festival will continue to offer programs for audience engagement in the digital sphere as well as in-person.

**Piccolo Spoleto:** An official companion to Spoleto Festival USA, this regional celebration of the arts and local community features hundreds of free and modestly priced events with a focus on accessibility and participation in the arts. Piccolo Spoleto is operated by the City of Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs. Visit [piccolospoleto.com](http://piccolospoleto.com) for more.

Since 1977, Spoleto Festival USA has welcomed international coverage of all kinds to document and review this multi-disciplinary celebration of the performing arts in Charleston, South Carolina. There's a lot going on: Each season typically includes more than 150 ticketed events, different artists and companies, and multiple performance series. In an effort to help writers capture the Festival, we've created a writer's guide.

### **We are Spoleto Festival USA.**

Please use the full name, including "USA," in all initial references. "Spoleto" or "the Festival" are accepted shortened versions for subsequent use.

**We are not** *Spoleto Festival, Spoleto Music Festival, Spoleto USA Festival, Spoleto USA.*

### **Corporate branding**

Many Spoleto Festival USA performances are generously supported by corporate sponsors; some are part of branded concert series. In 2021, branded series include:

#### **Wells Fargo Jazz**

*Concerts in this series are often held at the College of Charleston Cistern Yard. Concerts in 2021: Preservation Hall Jazz Band; New Orleans Celebration: A Tribute to Danny Barker; Two Wings: The Music of Black America in Migration; The Cookers*

#### **First Citizens Bank Front Row**

*Concerts in this series are often held at the College of Charleston Cistern Yard. Concerts in 2021: Sarah Jarosz, The Wood Brothers, Steep Canyon Rangers*

### **Spoleto Festival USA produces new work and presents new and existing work.**

In addition to presenting artists and their performances, the Festival produces its own operas each season, meaning all elements—from casting to design and direction—are determined by Spoleto Festival USA artistic leaders. The world premiere of *Omar*, slated to premiere in 2022, is a Spoleto Festival USA co-production, co-produced and co-commissioned by Spoleto Festival USA and Carolina Performing Arts at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

### **Spoleto Festival USA is a 501c3 non-profit organization.**

Through **Spoleto ETC (Engaging the Community)**, the Festival offers artist talks, master classes, in-school presentations, student workshops, free performance tickets, and more, as well as opportunities for professional advancement for young artists.

**Photos:** Find downloadable high resolution imagery in our Flickr gallery albums [at this link](#).

**Contact us!** Need fact-checking assistance? Looking for specific artist or production information? We are here to help. Please call or email the public relations office with any questions: [pressroom@spoletousa.org](mailto:pressroom@spoletousa.org).