

SPOLETO — FESTIVAL USA

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Spoletto Festival USA Celebrates Exceptional 48th Season

Sales at Spoleto's 48th Festival top an impressive \$3.53 million

September 26, 2024 (Charleston, SC) — Spoleto Festival USA 2024 marked a resounding success, drawing enthusiastic crowds from 13 countries around the world and 48 states, solidifying Spoleto's reputation as America's premier performing arts festival. Ticket sales topped \$3.53 million, the Festival's highest box office revenue since 40th anniversary celebrations at the 2016 Festival. Record private support was generated from corporate, institutional, and more than 1,000 household donors, whose generous gifts nearing \$5.5 million, up almost 30% year-over-year, play an integral role in advancing the Festival. 389 artists, from young performers to master musicians, came from 40 states and 22 countries delivering remarkable performances to diverse and adventurous audiences. Enthralling world premieres, new artistic leadership, sold-out performances, and a spike in first-time ticket buyers signal a bright future for the Festival nearing its fifth decade.

Remarking on his third Festival as General Director and CEO, Mena Mark Hanna said “this Festival was about more than critical acclaim. It was about seeing the audiences revel in wonder while listening to Yo-Yo Ma, experiencing the depth of artistry in *The Song of Rome*, marveling at the wondrous movement of LA Dance Project, and bopping to Pedrito Martinez and his band's mesmerizing instrumentals. There is nothing like this in the country, and hardly anything like this in the world.”

Paul Wiancko completed his first season as Spoleto's Charles E. and Andrea L. Volpe Director of Chamber Music with a fresh repertoire of beloved works spanning the classical canon and living composers. An emotional performance on Program II featured three of the four members of the now-disbanded St. Lawrence String Quartet performing Franz Schubert's Cello Quintet in C Major, D. 956, which was the final piece performed in the series for many years under the late Geoff Nuttall. Another particularly moving performance came during Program V when tenor Karim Sulayman (*Ruinous Gods*) accompanied a string quartet to perform Jonathan Dove's *In Damascus*, a composition that features the spoken accounting of life in a war-torn country by Syrian poet Ali Safar. Program IX featured the series' composer-in-residence Reena Esmail's world premiere string quartet *This is It*, which celebrated living in the moment through a series of eight miniatures paired with verbs indicating how the performers would play and react to one another. Earning an enthusiastic standing ovation, a nine-member ensemble ended the season with a rousing rendition of Francesco Geminiani's *La Follia*, with arrangement by Michi Wiancko. The piece, which Paul Wiancko described as having feelings of “joy, love, pain, and sorrow,” was accentuated by the thunderous stomps of the musicians.

Conductor Timothy Myers concluded his first season as Music Director of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra in two lively concerts and a four-performance run with L.A. Dance Project of *Romeo & Juliet Suite*. Myers led the Festival Orchestra in a live accompanying performance of Prokofiev's lush score, a first for the dance company. The Orchestra's first concert was highlighted by a world premiere cello concerto by Nathalie Joachim, *Had to Be*, a three-movement work written for acclaimed cellist Seth Parker Woods. And the season was rounded out by the groundbreaking program of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 and Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 1, performed by Festival regular Inon Barnatan.

Spoleto's two world premiering productions *Ruinous Gods* and *The Song of Rome* were launched to critical acclaim. *The Post and Courier* called *Ruinous Gods* "a mesmerizing work perfect for the Spoleto Festival stage." *The Wall Street Journal* called *The Song of Rome* "striking" while praising the cast and creative team. Both programs were co-produced by Spoleto Festival USA and serve the organization's mission to create and present works of the highest artistic caliber.

Stellar nationally-touring acts drew swarms of crowds that meant multiple sold-out performances during the 48th Festival. During the first week of Pride Month, the internationally celebrated drag performer Sasha Velour earned a standing ovation from a packed house at the Charleston Gaillard Center remarking "in my entire life, I never imagined I'd be on a stage like this." Sasha Velour's *The Big Reveal Live Show!* was a celebratory night of Velour's signature jaw-dropping reveals, heartwarming storytelling, and impressive looks. CEO and President of Charleston Pride Mollie Soto said, "The queer joy that we all felt on Thursday at Sasha's show was indescribable."

Front Row Series performers Jason Isbell and Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue delivered memorable performances to enthralled crowds. Isbell remarked about the beauty of the College of Charleston Cistern's columns, live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, and twinkling lights in front of a sold-out crowd on the first of his two-night run in the picturesque outdoor venue. A little rain didn't dampen Trombone Shorty and Orleans Avenue's Festival return when a sold-out audience filled the TD Arena where the band paraded through the crowd drawing audiences to their feet.

Acclaimed cellist Yo-Yo Ma returned to the Festival after nearly four decades. Having played Spoleto's inaugural Chamber Music Series in 1977, Ma remarked from the stage of a sold-out Charleston Gaillard Center in 2024 that he is "so grateful to Charleston for teaching me what it means to be a musician in the service of society." Joined by collaborators Angélique Kidjo and Jeremy Dutcher, the evening's program blended genres and embraced cultural diversity, mixing Kidjo's African beats and Dutcher's indigenous hymns with Ma's classical canon including Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major.

Even more audiences were able to access the 48th Festival through community engagement initiatives. The "Pay What You Will" ticket pricing program allowed ticket buyers to attend more than 20 Festival performances for as low as \$7 per ticket. More than 300 complimentary tickets were delivered to 23 local nonprofit organizations through the Festival's Open Stage Door program supporting charitable organizations in the Lowcountry.

On Thursday, May 23, Spoleto Festival USA's Opening Gala was held in the heart of the holy city. The event, emceed by Festival returner Denis O'Hare, and featuring a surprise performance from Broadway's John Cameron Mitchell, was a whirlwind of elegance, artistry, and community spirit that raised over \$590,000, a Festival record, through tables, tickets, contributions, auctions, and a paddle raise to sponsor Festival Orchestra and Chorus fellows.

This year, the Festival also celebrated milestone partnerships with many esteemed corporate sponsors including 31 years of support from Bank of America, 30 years from Wells Fargo, 30 years from BMW Group Plant Spartanburg, and 29 years from BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina. These companies share Spoleto Festival USA's commitment to enriching the community through the power of the performing arts.

On the heels of this banner year, the Festival reported a strong financial position at the close of its fiscal year 2024 on Aug. 31 with ticket sales and donor contributions reaching the highest amount since 2016, and net assets of more than \$20 million. Spoleto continues to drive tourism and the Charleston economy, welcoming thousands of guests and employing 28 year-round Charleston-based staff, 285 seasonal staff, and engaging nearly 250 volunteers. A 2023 study by the College of Charleston calculated Spoleto's annual economic impact from out-of-town visitors at greater than \$29.4 million.

For more information about Spoleto Festival USA, visit spoletousa.org.

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SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

Spoleto Festival USA was founded in 1977 by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Gian Carlo Menotti, who sought to create an American counterpart to the annual Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, which he had founded in 1958. Now in its 48th year, Spoleto Festival USA is internationally recognized as America's premier performing arts festival. For 17 days and nights each spring, Spoleto Festival USA fills Charleston's historic theaters, churches, and outdoor spaces with performances in opera; theater; dance; and chamber, symphonic, choral, and jazz music. Spoleto's mission is to present 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 unique performance opportunities for established artists. Beyond its role as a launching pad for young talent, Spoleto also serves as a catalyst for cultural change and has aided in Charleston's flourishing as a top arts and culture destination. With General Director & CEO Mena Mark Hanna at its helm, the 2025 season takes place from May 23 to June 8 in various locations throughout Charleston. Spoleto Festival USA is a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization.

IMAGES: A selection of high-resolution images can be found in the [online gallery](#).

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