

SPOLETO FESTIVAL U.S.A.

OPENING CEREMONY

REMARKS BY MAYOR JOSEPH P. RILEY, JR.

May 25, 2012

Thank you, Carlos Evans, for your leadership as Chairman of the Board of Spoleto Festival U.S.A.

Fifty-four years ago in a beautiful Umbrian hilltop city, a city like Charleston that history had forgotten before it destroyed, an arts festival like no other was begun. It was a world-acclaimed, enormous success. Twenty years later in 1977, this city, inspired by that festival's success and with that beautiful city's name, began Spoleto Festival U.S.A., which became world-acclaimed as well and transformative for this city and its citizens.

This festival indeed reminds us of the transformative power of the arts and, in a moment, I will briefly tell you why and how.

But first, I wish to express our city's gratitude for Mayor Benedetti, the Mayor, or Sindaco, of Spoleto, for coming to our festival, for your commitment to our Sister City relationship and extend to you, Mr. Mayor, and your citizens, our unending gratitude for your gift to us – the inspiration to create this remarkable celebration of the arts.

I also wish to thank Chairman Landesman, not only for his very kind words, but more important for his transformative leadership for the arts in our country. Rocco Landesman has done something new and different with the position of head of the National Endowment for the Arts. He has worked to make the Endowment for the Arts not only an energetic part of our national agenda; he has integrated it into all facets of our national government. For the first time, this Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts works with the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to help create more livable, creative and humane communities. He works with the Secretary of Transportation to not just make new roads and highways, but more livable places in our country. Every federal agency, because of his leadership, is now an energetic partner with the National Endowment for the Arts, which is as it should be, because the arts are not frills, or extras, or nice things to have; the arts are essential, and the arts are transformative, and nowhere more in evidence than in this city.

For what happens in these next 17 days is this: In the almost 800 events as a part of Spoleto and Piccolo Spoleto, every one of those hundreds of performers – each one – every one – is committed to the same thing – and that is to excel – to do their very best – whether it is to make us laugh or make us cry, to challenge us to hope, to look in the deepest parts of our hearts, to appeal to our creative impulses and energies, whether it's through their voice or voices, by the grace of their dance, the clarity and soaring nature of their music and so much more – each and every artist, performer at that moment, every moment, is seeking to excel. That is the transformative power of the arts. For the challenge of life as individuals, or collectively as a city or a country, is not to just muddle through – to not just accept mediocrity. The challenge is with what we are given, our time, our life, our capacities is to seek to excel. This festival and that

experience for our community have led the most remarkable transformation of this city. For being exposed to that power of the arts makes it more difficult, if not impossible, in the work we do here to accept anything but the very best-- whether it's in the way we design housing for the poor, or build parks, or remake highways, build a performance hall, care for the hungry or homeless, or build the world's best and newest airliner, and so much more. What has occurred in these 36 years in this community is people challenging each other to do better – to excel in what we do, and that has led to the remarkable transformation of this city – and that, Mayor Benedetti, Chairman Landesman, and my fellow citizens, is the gift of the arts and Spoleto Festival U.S.A.

And I might add we cannot overestimate the impact of this festival on our children and the memories they are given. Thirty-six years ago a child from our inner-city, with some other classmates, received tickets to the Eliot Feld Ballet – their first arts performance experience in their lives. One of those former students is here today. In fact, he just offered the invocation. He has become a distinguished pastor, the father of 2 fine sons – one a second lieutenant in the United States Air Force. You can ask Reverend Swinton and he will tell you he still remembers that first experience of the grace and beauty of great dancers in his hometown as a little boy at Spoleto Festival U.S.A.

This most extraordinary and prodigious effort of producing Spoleto Festival U. S.A. is the result of the dedication of hundreds of people. I would like to congratulate them all, especially the Board of Directors; Chairman Evans, former Chairman Ingram, former Chairs, Charlie Way and Homer Burrous, Joel Smith, Bill Hewitt, Jack Kessler and, in memory, Eric

Friberg and most especially the first Chair, soon to celebrate his 100th birthday, Ted Stern. I thank the Board, our generous benefactors; our founding Artistic Director, Gian Carlo Menotti; Geoff Nuttall, Joe Flummerfelt, Charles Wadsworth, John Kennedy for years of service; Nigel Redden, Rhys Williams, John Paul and Spoleto's wonderful staff; Ellen Dressler Moryl, our wonderful Director of Cultural Affairs that produces Piccolo Spoleto, and there is nothing like it in the world either; our City Council, County Council, our state and federal government, the National Endowment of the Arts and all who worked so hard, and the hundreds of volunteers and others who make this day and this festival possible.

As we begin our 36th year, I express my annual wish that Spoleto Festival U.S.A. will continue to exist in Charleston as long as our people search for truth and beauty and may that be forever.

And now I would like to add a few words to our friends from Italy. SALUTI AI NOSTRI AMICI ITALIANI. SPERIAMO CHE QUESTA CITTA E IL NOSTRO FESTIVALE SIANO VERAMENTE SIGNIFICATIVI E STIMOLANTI. OFFRO IL NOSTRO BENVENUTO A CHARLESTON, E BENVENUTO A SPOLETO U.S.A.

And now, Maestro, let the music begin, the dancers dance, the choirs sing, the children play and the banners fly! I hereby declare the 36th Spoleto Festival U.S.A. has begun!!