

SPOLETO FESTIVAL U.S.A.
OPENING CEREMONY
REMARKS BY MAYOR JOSEPH P. RILEY, JR.
MAY 23, 2014

Thank you Carlos Evans, distinguished platform guests. And Rev. Pinckney thank you for your beautiful invocation. I should mention to the audience that Rev. Pinckney is not only pastor of Historic Emanuel AME Church, but also a distinguished member of the South Carolina State Senate. He is wonderful pastor and public servant.

In a few moments, we will begin the world's most comprehensive arts festival in this incomparably beautiful city. There is really nothing quite like this in the world.

For those who visit our city for the first time, or former Charlestonians who return after long absences, they ask me the "How"? How did Charleston become so beautifully regenerated? My answer is that there are many reasons, but one might start with noon May 25, 1977 when Spoleto Festival USA began. It is not the national and international publicity the Festival received that caused this regeneration, although that was most helpful. Rather, it was the gift of a basic human quality that is essential for great achievement and, that is, the exposure to the passionate quest for excellence.

At the Dock Street Theater in 30 minutes and throughout this Festival -- there and Memminger, the Sottile, TD Arena, the Cistern, Emmett Robinson, Footlight Players Workshop, the Gibbes, Halsey, Waterfront Park Gallery, at churches, squares, parks, and more -- for the next 17 days our hearts will be moved by the sight and sound created by these performers and artists who are seeking to do at that very moment the best they have ever done -- whose hearts

are are burning not to do well or okay, but to soar – to excel. That is the “ How” – how this city has changed. That is the gift of Spoleto Festival USA.

That experience challenges this city and our citizens in all that we do – to reject the easy, the medium, the just okay. To demand of ourselves what we see and hear from these great artists to expend great energy and passion – to seek to excel in what we build, in how we act and care for each other.

After May 25, 1977, this city was never the same. We see it all around us every year. This year the exquisite small Northbridge Waterfront Park, West of the Ashley, is opening next Tuesday. The Charleston Promise Neighborhood, a non-profit headed by former Spoleto Chair Bill Hewitt, is working with intercity schools in Charleston and North Charleston. This summer, for the first time in their lives, 250 children will have summer- long learning enrichment. Charleston Promise will be a national model.

The Gaillard Performance Hall, its stunning beauty becoming apparent, will be one of the most beautiful and finest performing halls in our country. And we are planning to build and give to our country the International African American Museum, which will be a beautiful building on our water’s edge on the site where enslaved Africans landed, and will help present the amazing and stirring story of African Americans’ contributions to making this great country we have today.

You all will be very happy to know that I am not going to give you my complete State of the City Address, but the point is this city and this community is seeking excellence in all that we

do. The quest to excel that we are moved by in these 17 days burns within the hearts of the citizens of this city all year long. That is the gift of Spoleto Festival USA. That explains what you see in Charleston now.

I most heartedly thank all who work so hard and so generously to make possible Spoleto Festival USA – Chairman Carlos Evans; our past Chairs Martha, Eric, Bill, Joel, Homer, Charlie Ted; Nigel and his wonderful staff; Charles Wadsworth, Joe Flummerfelt, Geoff Nuttall and John Kennedy. Our wonderful Ellen Moryl, who began Piccolo Spoleto, and her successor, Scott Watson and his staff, put on the amazing Piccolo Spoleto Festival with 700 events. Thanks to the hundreds of volunteers and staff who make this arts festival possible. I wish to thank my colleagues on City Council, County Council, and state and national government members whose support has been critically important to this festival.

And now, as we begin our 38th 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 38th Spoleto Festival U.S.A. has begun!!