

SPOLETO FESTIVAL U.S.A.

OPENING CEREMONY

REMARKS BY MAYOR JOSEPH P. RILEY, JR.

MAY 22, 2015

I'd like to recognize our platform guests, which include the Charleston Symphony Orchestra Brass Ensemble; Rev. Dr. William Swinton, Pastor, Ebenezer AME Church; Mr. Ed Sellers, Chairman of the Board, Spoleto Festival USA; Mr. Joo Won Kang, baritone, who sang the National Anthem; Mr. Fabrizio Cardarelli, Mayor, Spoleto, Italy; Dr. Jane Chu, Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts. Platform guests also include Mr. Ken May, Executive Director, SC Arts Commission; and Dr. Sarah Lynn Hayes, Vice-Chair, SC Arts Commission.

I invited Rev. Swinton to offer the invocation today for a special reason. Thirty-nine festivals ago, Rev. Swinton, a young student, took advantage of the city's offering of free tickets to students and attended the first Spoleto Festival USA. He is now the distinguished leader of the very prominent Ebenezer AME Church in the Eastside of Charleston. A few years ago I had the pleasure of shaking his son's hand as he received his diploma graduating from my alma mater, The Citadel.

Yesterday, I called Charles Weiss. He told me he was almost 96 ½. Charles lives in a retirement community in Chapel Hill, NC. I called him because I knew he couldn't be here

today, but 39 festivals ago Charles and his wife Shirley were on the front row and the front row of every performance. They came every year. One year they attended 55 ticketed events in Piccolo Spoleto and Spoleto Festival USA. We became dear friends.

I mention these 2 special people as examples of the now countless hundreds of thousands of people over these 39 Festivals who have had their hearts moved, their souls touched, their horizons lifted, their aspirations enhanced, creative impulses charged, anguish soothed, and more, by this unequaled combination of symphonies, choirs, operas, dance, jazz, theater, visual arts, poetry, and more, in our performance halls, our cathedrals, our synagogues, our parks and squares and all housed within this incomparably human-scaled city. There is nothing like Spoleto Festival USA in the world and for everyone who participates, when the Festival is over, they are changed.

And for the city that gives the Festival, when the Festival is over, it is changed as well.

For a great arts festival overwhelms its sponsoring city with unrelenting day and night exposure to the driving quest for excellence. Every string, every voice, every dance or baton movement, each note, each large choir sounding like one, and a soloist soaring and more, the countless years of practice and sacrifice and reaching down deep to excel – the quest for perfection. And that is the gift of Spoleto Festival USA to this city – the gift of the almost overwhelming, demanding felt responsibility to be even better than before; thus the day- to-day grind that can lend itself to acceptance of mediocrity is repulsed. Whatever it is -- designing buildings, or creating programs

and initiatives for the poor and our children, creating new economic opportunities or institutions and partnerships— a city just can't accept mediocrity after having been exposed to this Festival.

To paraphrase the question asked in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral, "Where is the monument to Sir Christopher Wren?" -- if asked where the monument in Charleston is to Spoleto, the response is "Just look around us." Whether it's the extraordinarily beautiful new Gaillard Center opening this fall, or the Cradle to Career program, or our work to build the International African American Museum on Charleston Harbor in an exquisitely beautiful building to honor, teach and present the history of African Americans who were brought here and who helped build this city and our country, our world class parks, our King Street -- and so much more. At every turn in this community, people are striving to excel, make lives better, the community more beautiful and more livable, and build on every experience we have in these extraordinary 17 days.

And now I wish to warmly thank all who work so hard and generously to make Spoleto Festival USA possible. Chairman Ed Sellers; our past Chairs: Carlos, Martha, Eric, Bill, Joe, Homer, Charlie, Ted; Nigel and his wonderful staff. To Charles Wadsworth, Joe Flummerfelt, Geoff Nuttall, Joe Miller, John Kennedy; and our Piccolo Spoleto team: Scott Watson and before him, Ellen Moryl. To the thousands of volunteers, to my wonderful colleagues on City Council, County Council, our state and national government and all the donors who sacrifice to make this festival possible -- my unending gratitude.

And now, as we begin our 39th 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 39th Spoleto Festival U.S.A. has begun!!