



City of Charleston

John J. Tecklenburg

Mayor

The following address was prepared for delivery by Mayor John J. Tecklenburg on May 27, 2016, at the Spoleto Festival U.S.A. Opening Ceremonies.

Chairman Sellers, President Medich, distinguished guests and friends:

Good afternoon and benvenuti. Welcome.

I am very honored to be with you here today, as America's most comprehensive arts festival begins its fortieth season in the streets and the great public venues of what I truly believe is America's most beautiful city. But before we officially declare its commencement, I'd like to take a moment to thank all the people who've worked so tirelessly to make this extraordinary festival possible, and to tell you how much Spoleto Festival USA means to Charleston and its people.

First, to Ed Sellers, Bill Medich, Nigel Redden, board members, and the entire Spoleto family, past and present, including donors and volunteers: thank you so much for the tremendous gift you have given our city. Few will ever fully understand the phenomenal commitment of time and resources you have pledged to this great civic transformation, and how little you have asked in return. We are deeply grateful to you, one and all, and we salute you for your service.

I also want to thank my colleagues on City Council, and Spoleto's partners at the federal, state, county and city levels. This festival is a public private partnership in the best sense of the term -- and hard working men and women, like our own director of cultural affairs, Scott Watson are a vital ingredient in its continuing success. Thanks to the efforts of Scott and his fine team of professionals and community artists, this year's Spoleto Festival will once again be complimented by its companion festival, Piccolo Spoleto, with more than 500 events and exhibits, featuring classical music, jazz, dance, theatre, poetry readings and more.

Finally, as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of Spoleto Festival USA, I'd like to pay tribute to two towering figures in the life and days of this magnificent festival and the incomparable city it calls home -- Maestro Gian Carlo Menotti and Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr.

President John F. Kennedy -- a man who thought deeply and well about the grand sweep of human history and culture -- once observed that "there is a connection, hard to explain logically but easy to feel, between achievement in public life and progress in the arts. The age of Pericles was also the age of Phidias. The age of Lorenzo de Medici was also the age of Leonardo da Vinci -- the age of Elizabeth also the age of Shakespeare."

Here in Charleston, we understand in our bones the truth of those words, for we have seen that connection with our own eyes. We know firsthand that the age of Riley was also the age of Menotti and Spoleto, and we know that our city's great flowering of arts and culture, of civic

pride and progress -- in short, our modern Renaissance -- could never have happened without them.

They are two of the great men of Spoleto history, the indispensable figures in this festival's unflinching, unyielding quest for excellence in all things. And it is my honor -- our honor -- to pay tribute to their extraordinary achievements here today.

Excellence in all things. That's quite a phrase, isn't it? As Mayor Riley always noted on these occasions, this impressively ambitious festival is nothing less than a great call to excellence for our city and its citizens, and a welcome annual reminder of who we are as a people.

After all, it would be tempting for a city as beautiful and blessed as ours to fall into a kind of cozy complacency -- to trade the sweat and striving of the hard-won best for the ease and comfort of the agreeably adequate.

Yes, that could be tempting for a city like Charleston. But the forceful example of this festival and its remarkable artists simply will not allow it. Every year, we are exposed to greatness -- and every year, we are inspired and transformed by the experience, as the human spirit is uplifted.

And if that were the full story of this festival and the city it calls home, surely it would be enough -- more than enough. But, of course, that isn't the full story. There's something else there, too -- something we perhaps don't mention as often as we should. And that something is simple human joy, which is suddenly all around us every summer at this time.

Joy is there in the hearts of the artists, as a lifetime of effort enables them to turn talent to truth, and truth to beauty. Joy is there in the faces of the audiences, as they follow the artist's vision wherever it may lead, from the confirmation of the classic to the shock of the new. And Joy is there in the spirit of the young man or woman who's about to take the A train from Brooklyn to Sugar Hill for the very first time, and whose life will be forever changed by the journey.

"She sang beyond the genius of the sea," the poet Wallace Stevens once wrote, in trying to capture the beauty of a young woman's song as she walked along the shore, and the powerful feelings he experienced as he watched her perform.

For the next 17 days, it will be our privilege to witness such wonders. And for the rest of our lives, it will be our joy to remember and to treasure them.

And so, Maestro, once again, let the music begin. Let the dancers dance beyond the brilliance of the song. Let the players play beyond the beauty of the stage. And let the singers sing beyond the genius of the sea.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

Let the 40th annual Spoleto Festival begin!

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