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SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA 2008: A CELEBRATED SEASON

****The 32nd festival marked by artistic
accomplishment, critical praise
and single ticket sales record****

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA – With 145 performances ranging from the American premiere of the run-away hit *Monkey: Journey to the West* to the dazzling dance moves of the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève, the 2008 Spoleto Festival USA, held May 23 through June 8, was widely applauded by critics and audiences alike. “Perhaps America’s premier arts festival,” declared the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Audience response to the festival’s bold programming proved strong in 2008 with ticket sales reaching \$2.875 million and the Festival setting a single ticket sales record.

The season opened with the widely-anticipated premiere of Anthony Davis’ newly reworked landmark opera *Amistad* which inaugurated the recently renovated Memminger Auditorium. *Opera Today* declared the production “a coup of music theater for Spoleto – an experiment in opera grand and intimate and timely in its content.” Russell Platt of the *New Yorker* complimented Sam Helfrich’s “deft direction” adding that “Emmanuel Villaume (Spoleto’s Music Director for Opera & Orchestra) conducts with style.” Tim Page of the *Post and Courier*, though less than enthusiastic about the production overall, said that Villaume led “with the diligence and musicianship we have come to expect from him. We are lucky to have him in Charleston.”

Spoleto Festival USA’s other 2008 opera offering also garnered stellar reviews with the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* calling *La Cenerentola* “a splendid production.” Tim

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Page recommended that readers “run to get tickets” while the *Charleston City Paper* gave it an “A+”. Featured in the leading role, Sandra Piques Eddy received high praise from the *New York Times* which said that “the brightest sparkle belonged to Ms. Piques Eddy, a swan-necked mezzo with fine technique, a range of colors from honeyed to bright and charm to burn.”

The U.S. premiere of the music theater piece *Monkey: Journey to the West* was nothing short of a phenomenon. Anne Midgette of the *Washington Post* declared it “the hottest ticket of the Spoleto season.” Audiences agreed – with popular demand leading to the addition of two more sold-out performances for a total of 19. The *Post and Courier* summed it up as “two hours of razzle-dazzle stagecraft” with the *Wall Street Journal* labeling it a “visual feast.”

On Nottingham Playhouse’s *The Burial at Thebes*, Paula Citron of Canada’s *Globe and Mail* wrote, “the acting is an embarrassment of riches with an unbelievably strong cast.” The *Post and Courier* agreed saying that “the performers were beyond praise” and that it was “one of the great events of Spoleto Festival USA 2008.” Other theater events included festival favorite *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, which the *Charlotte Observer* lauded by saying it “lies beyond comparison, description or explanation”, plus Hotel Modern’s inventive *The Great War* which *The State* said “ranks up there with one of the best things the festival has done in the past decade.”

The acclaimed Boston Ballet headlined the Carolina First Dance Series and their performance was said to be “radiant in its execution” by the *Post and Courier*. The paper also praised Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève saying that “the Ballet seems to be up for anything” and describing their dance as “as timeless, indefinable ecstasy of movement.” The Donna Uchizono Company’s performance elicited a wide range of reactions with Jeffrey Day of *The State* declaring it “one of the most exciting things I experienced this year” while Dottie Ashley of the *Post and Courier* stated “go spend your \$32 elsewhere.”

On the music front, the festival continued to shine. The U.S. debut of Brazilian pianist Heloísa Fernandes on the Wachovia Jazz series was labeled “exhilarating” by the *Charleston City Paper* while Tim Page described her as “luminous and lyrical.” The string quintet Imani Winds also wowed audience and critics with the *Post and Courier*

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saying that the group “mesmerized the rapt audience and left them anticipating the group’s very bright future.” Meanwhile the demand for tickets to see the string band Carolina Chocolate Drops led to two of their four shows being moved from the College of Charleston Recital Hall to the much-larger outdoor venue of the Cistern. In addition, audience members attending a performance of Laurie Anderson’s provocative multimedia piece *Homeland* got an unexpected bonus when Anderson’s husband Lou Reed joined her on stage for a song.

The consistently popular Bank of America Chamber Music series had another acclaimed year under the leadership of Artistic Director Charles Wadsworth and newly appointed Associate Artistic Director Geoff Nuttall. This was the first of two years of performances in the Memminger Auditorium while the Dock Street Theater is being renovated and audiences and critics both responded positively to the setting. As the festival ended Wadsworth announced that he will retire after the 2009 season – which will mark both his 80th birthday and his 50th festival since he started the chamber music series at the Festival of the Two Worlds.

Every year, the education department at Spoleto Festival USA works with local teachers, schools, organizations, and individuals to bring the vibrant offerings of the festival into the classroom. This year in addition to normal classroom work, the festival also offered a number of public events connected to *Amistad* which were both well attended and well-received. In all, Spoleto’s Education and Outreach program reached an impressive 3,000 participants during the 17 day festival, including both classroom and public programs.

The 2009 Spoleto Festival USA is slated for May 22 through June 7. Tickets go on sale in January. For more information on Spoleto Festival USA, please visit www.spoletousa.org or call 843.722.2764.

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