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SOUTH PARK MAGAZINE

Celebrating the arts

GLENNA BASSETT MUSANTE

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Editor's note: Glenna Bassett Musante is blogging from Spoleto May 28 through June 2. To see her entries, [click here](#).

“Love at first sight.” These were the words Pulitzer Prize-winning opera composer Gian Carlo Menotti used to describe Charleston after his first visit in the early 1970’s. In a letter he composed in 1977, Menotti says he was enchanted by the city’s “unique beautythe magic of its streets, the noble charm of its buildings, the warmth of its citizens.” He quickly embraced it as his own, and in that marriage of maestro and venue established Charleston as the annual home of the famed Spoleto Festival USA. Over time, Menotti’s love affair with Charleston has grown into a spectacular affair of the arts. This year, as Spoleto Festival USA celebrates its 35th anniversary (as well as Menotti’s 100th birthday),

the maestro's gift to this Low Country love continues to grow in depth, beauty and even surprise with this year's staging of over 150 performances by 48 ensembles from May 26 through June 12. Menotti's original concept for Spoleto USA was a festival that would provide an annual summer stage worthy of great masters and masterworks, as well as "fertile ground for the young with new ideas." Spoleto Festival USA 2011 continues to thrive true to his vision, offering a fanfare of productions covering a broad spectrum of artistic tastes.

Something for every taste

Opera. Theater. Bluegrass. Jazz. Ballet. Hip Hop. Indie-Pop. Chamber music. Gospel. Contemporary circus. Performance art. This year's festival offers so much entertainment and wonder and it could be hard to know which tickets to buy. The full artistic lineup can be found at Spoletousa.org. But a few performances are must-see's. To be staged at the historic, and newly renovated, Dock Street Theatre, "The Medium" is Spoleto Festival USA's 35th anniversary homage to Menotti, who died in 2007 and would have turned 100 in July. Composed by Menotti in the 1940's, "The Medium's" artistic team includes director John Pascoe, a colleague of Menotti's (and director of last season's acclaimed "Flora, an Opera.") The conductor, Joseph Flummerfelt, was a Menotti protégé. "The Medium" runs May 28-June 10. Two other operas promise to please. In the American premiere of "Emilie" by Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, world-renowned soprano Elizabeth Futral will make her Spoleto debut. The festival will also present a beloved Mozart masterwork, "The Magic Flute." The Kneehigh Theatre troupe from Cornwall, UK, performs "The Red Shoes," a theatrical adaptation of the classic Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale. The story of an orphan who becomes so obsessed with a new pair of shoes that she can't stop dancing, "The Red Shoes" is a bit grim and grisly, as most European fairy tales are, but has been described as surprisingly inventive. Plus it offers a well-timed metaphor for the perils of vanity, consumerism and materialism. "The Red Shoes" runs May 26 (preview night) through June 5. This year's theater lineup also includes Ireland's Druid Theatre making its festival debut with their award-winning production of "The Cripple of Inishman." Acclaimed jazz vocalist Dianne Reeves will have one performance, to be held May 30, at the Gaillard Auditorium. But take heart, jazz

lovers. Spoleto Festival USA's 2011 Wells Fargo Jazz series also includes the ensemble work of Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue, Norwegian jazz pianist Ketil Bjornstad and an outdoor evening concert by Brazilian jazz accordionist Toninho Ferragutti at the historic Cistern Yard on the campus of the College of Charleston. A music theater production that Spoleto organizers recommend is "The Gospel at Colonus," which they describe as "a radical reworking of Sophocles' 'Oedipus at Colonus' set in a modern-day (African American) Pentecostal church," with the award-winning Blind Boys of Alabama and a well-known Charleston gospel choir chiming in as Greek chorus. "The Gospel at Colonus" runs June 8-12. Plus, there will be performances by Spain's Corella Ballet, described as one of Europe's hottest new ballet companies; Grammy-award-winning blue grass artist Bela Fleck playing with the Original Flecktones; Australia's innovative circus company, Circa; daily Chamber Music performances; and the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra performing Strauss, Debussy and Prokofiev. There are also dozens of parties and celebrations. Many are private, but some are open to the public. This includes the festive Opening Ceremonies at City Hall at noon on May 27, hosted by Charleston's long time mayor, Joe Riley, and the Opening Night Fete – a ticketed benefit gala hosted by the festival. And there are fabulous packages that underscore the profound impact Spoleto has had on Charleston's economy. In 1976, there were few restaurants or hotels in the city. But over the years, Spoleto has attracted many world-class chefs. Today the city's restaurant scene could rival New York or San Francisco. The city has also attracted dozens of fabulous hotels and several in the city's historic district offer discounted Spoleto packages. A quick insider's tip: According to festival organizers, Charleston Place, which offers a variety of Spoleto packages, is a favorite with the performers. Staying there, especially on the hotel's exclusive private club level on the seventh and eighth floors, you might meet your favorite Spoleto idol. And somewhere along the line you might also hear a chorus or two singing happy birthday to Gian Carlo Menotti, his legacy wrapped in the warm embrace of two wondrous true loves – Charleston, and the performing arts.

Want to go? Tickets: For some of the more popular performances, including Dianne Reeves, tickets should be purchased in advance. But with over 150 performances being offered over the course of the festival, seats for some events

may be available the day of the event. Tickets can be purchased now through the end of the festival online at [Spoletousa.org](https://spoletousa.org), by phone at 843-579-3100 and in person at the Spoleto Festival USA box office at the Gaillard Municipal Auditorium in Charleston.

Websites Tickets, venues & performance lineups: www.spoletousa.org

Charleston Visitor's Bureau, hotel and ticket packages:

www.charlestoncvb.com/visitors

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