CHARLIE’S LAST DANCE

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DURHAM — Charles Reinhart, 80, has spent over half his life at the helm of the American Dance Festival. So, when he announced that this season — his 43rd — would be his last as director, ADF co-director Jodee Nimerichter and others, decided to make this summer one to remember for the many affectionately call “Charlie.”

“This will be an incredibly special celebratory season to honor all Charles has done,” Nimerichter said.

The festival begins today with a gala performance in honor of Reinhart’s long career in which he has championed many talented choreographers and introduced them to the world. He began that career in 1968 when he became director of ADF, then located in New London, Conn.

Proceeds from the sale of gala tickets (performance and reception) go to the newly established Charles L. and Stephanie Reinhart Fund, which will support future tuition scholarships, commissions and special projects. So far, over $60,000 has been raised for the fund, Nimerichter said.

Chuck Davis and his Durham-based African American Dance Ensemble (AADE) open the gala at the Durham Performing Arts Center with an excerpt from “Celebration,” an homage to traditional African dance and drumming.

“I’m celebrating, with AADE, the totally Char-
lie,” Davis said. “Since 1972, he has been part of my dance life — counseling, critiquing. I would call Charlie at any time for advice about everything from soup to nuts.”

Davis first met Reinhart in 1972 when Davis’ first troupe, based in New York, performed at ADF in New London. After the festival’s move to Durham in 1978, Reinhart invited Davis and his company to head the festival’s community outreach. As a result of teaching classes to local young people, Davis realized there were enough talented dancers here to form a Durham troupe and Reinhart encouraged him to do so, Davis said. “Charlie is the reason for the birth of AADE,” he added.

Reinhart also advised Davis to hire Pam Martin (Green) as the new troupe’s manager, which served them well as Martin had everything it took to be a good manager including fortitude and stability, Davis said.

The AADE Gala performance also pays tribute to “the fact that the man is an international figure and if he decides to run for president, he would get a lot of dancers’ votes,” Davis said.

The gala lineup includes a “visitation” by the legendary Martha Graham, a founder of ADF. Choreographer Mark Dendy brings the late grand dame of modern dance to the stage in his 10-minute performance. “We’ve seen him impersonate Martha Graham in the past and he’s just brilliant. We had a hard time believing it wasn’t him,” Nimerichter said.

At a January New York Gala honoring Reinhart, Dendy’s Martha served as master of ceremonies.

Other gala performances today feature Martha Clarke’s 1980 solo “Pagliaccio,” reconstructed with ADF support and performed by John Kelly; the ADF debut of The Scottish Dance Theater performing the U.S. premiere of the 2010 “Drift,” an intense and highly physical duet that Nimerichter saw last August in Scotland; and Hubbard Street Dance in an excerpt from Ohad Naharin’s “THREE TO MAX.”

The evening will conclude with remarks by Reinhart.

When reached by phone at his New York home earlier this week, Reinhart said he planned to speak off-the-cuff. At the January gala, he had prepared his remarks. “My adrenaline took over and I went up there with these sheets of stories to tell.” Then, before he could do so, gala planners surprised him with a film about his life. “All the stories were in the film,” he said. So, he tore up those sheets of paper and spoke whatever came to mind, including some thank-yous, he said.

At tonight’s gala, the audience will see the same film. Then, Reinhart will speak. “I hope my remarks are pleasant to the audience,” he said.