Since its founding in 1934 as the Bennington School of the Dance, the American Dance Festival has grown from 10 students and four choreographers into an international institution. Now held at Duke University in North Carolina, ADF has two summer schools, a full performance season, community initiatives and a post-baccalaureate certificate and MFA program. The summer festival has commissioned some 630 world premieres, with president Charles Reinhart as the guiding force behind many of them.

Reinhart has held just about every non-performance job in the dance world: producer, curator, manager and consultant. During the 1960s, he found himself in the hothed of modern dance in New York City, when he managed seminal companies Paul Taylor Dance Company, Meredith Monk/The House and the Glen Tetley Dance Company. When he arrived at ADF in 1968 (then held at Connecticut College), he joined dance educator Martha Myers, and together they worked to move ADF forward until her retirement in 2000. During his tenure, Reinhart has commissioned notable works from choreographers including Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharp, Laura Dean and Mark Morris. After this season, Reinhart will step down from ADF, but not before going out with a bang. Paying homage to ADF’s past while continuing to generate new work, the 2011 performance season includes world premieres by Paul Taylor, Pilobolus (in collaboration with Japanese dancer Takuya Muramatsu), Martha Clarke and Shen Wei.

**Dance Teacher: How did you get involved with ADF?**

**Charles Reinhart:** They asked me, though it was a conditional move. I said I would stay for a year. They also asked me to work with Martha Myers, and that turned out to be a great professional marriage. Together, we blasted forward while paying respect to the past.

**DT:** Talk a bit about commissioning, which has been a central mission of yours at ADF.

**CR:** When you’re in a position to select artists, it’s important to pick people you believe in. And you have to make a commitment to bring those artists back. (If you commissioned Beethoven, you wouldn’t stop after the sixth symphony.) Then you fill the other part of the scale with new artists. That balance is important. You have to help choreographers make new work; commissions fuel the fertility of the choreographer.
DT: You've commissioned so many Paul Taylor pieces for ADF, and this year, he's premiering another. Do you have a favorite?

CR: I don't have enough fingers to name my favorites, but I do have a particular connection to Aureole. Paul had invited me to his 6th Avenue studio. At the time I had only seen his famous 1957 piece at the 92nd Street Y where he just stood still, a work as avant-garde as it gets. But when the company danced Aureole, my mouth fell open. It was so beautiful and so different. I could not believe what I saw. That piece has always been special to me.

DT: What do you consider your most lasting contribution?

CR: Modern dance was pretty unknown in the 1950s. Even my family had no idea who Paul Taylor was. I remember when I was managing his company, National Endowment for the Arts had a touring program and we did a pilot program in Illinois. We spent a week in Chicago and a week in a small town where they probably thought he was related to June Taylor. But by the end of that tour, they knew. Today, who doesn't know who Paul Taylor is?

The whole philosophy of supporting the choreographers we believed in, and informing the press and the public of the value of this indigenous American artform—that was our message at ADF. Modern dance is known all over the world now. Martha Myers and I worked hard to spread the seeds. We could not have dreamed we would get this far.

DT: Any thoughts on ADF’s future?

CR: I am so pleased our former dean Jodee Nimerichter is taking over. She will envision the festival in her own light. We are like evangelicals in the best sense, spreading the word of modern dance. Individual creativity is so important, now more than ever. I know Jodee will keep that going.

Nancy Wozny was a 2005 Fellow of the NEA Arts Journalism Institute for Dance Criticism at ADF and is currently a scholar-in-residence at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.