ADF welcomes Paul Taylor Dance

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DURHAM—For his 134th dance, choreographer Paul Taylor did something rare. He created “The Uncommitted” in honor of someone. That person happens to be American Dance Festival director Charles Reinhart.

Audiences here will see the world premiere of the work when the Paul Taylor Dance Company performs at the festival today through Saturday at the Durham Performing Arts Center. Taylor will attend the performance today.

When reached by phone this week in New York, Taylor said

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that he did it because Reinhart will step down after this ADF season ends Saturday — his 43rd year at the helm of the Durham-based festival.

Then, there's the 49-year association between Taylor and Reinhart that began in 1962 when Taylor hired Reinhart to be the first manager of his company. Since 1968, when Reinhart became director of ADF, then located in New London, Conn.

Taylor has been a regular at the festival and premiered many new works often commissioned by the festival.

The ADF and the Charles L. & Stephanie Reinhart Fund commissioned and helped fund the creation of Taylor's newest dance.

Finding Reinhart

In his autobiography “Private Domain,” Taylor recalls how he discovered Reinhart in a closet space in Isadora Bennett's office in New York's Wellington Hotel where he had gone to ask Bennett about a manager for his company. She had pointed him to Reinhart, working part time for her but about to go out on his own.

Taylor first heard his voice — “an optimistic voice with a New Jersey accent” and when he opened the closet door invited Reinhart to come to his studio that very afternoon to see his company rehearse a dance.

That dance was “Aureole,” which Reinhart has said blew him away. Taylor writes, “During ‘Aureole,’ he’s beaming, his smile a dead ringer for Alfalfa’s in the old ‘Our Gang’ movies and by the end of the run-through he’s fallen off the bench.” Reinhart took the job.

During his seven seasons as manager, Reinhart helped launch Taylor's company on a worldwide stage. “He went to the State Department and got us help in touring. He went with us all over the world. We've remained friends,” Taylor said.

Son named after Taylor

Both hold each other in high regard. Reinhart named one of his sons Taylor after the choreographer. “He has a range like no other as far as I'm concerned,” Reinhart said of Taylor's work. And, he wanted to show that range in choosing a couple of his favorite Taylor dances. He had trouble choosing just two dances. “The problem with Paul Taylor is that there are so many good works,” Reinhart said. He chose the 1991 “Company B” and 2002 “Promethean Fire.” The first “so catches the World War II time — the efforts on the home front to be jolly (Taylor uses songs by the Andrews Sisters) and the realities of war. And, that touches me deep-ly,” Reinhart said. The other dance, Taylor's response to 9/11, evokes "the destruction of the world and it ends with a message of hope and that's kind of the crux of our lives," Reinhart said.

Over the years, Reinhart has made his mark on the world of modern dance especially through the American Dance Festival, Taylor said.

“The American Dance Festival is probably the largest of its kind in the country with the largest enrollment, different types of classes. “A lot of students have become important choreographers,” Taylor said.

Those students include Mark Dendy, Mark Morris and Taylor himself.

While an ADF student, Taylor drew the attention of modern dance legend Martha Graham who invited him to join her company in 1955. He performed as a soloist for seven seasons. At the same time, he continued to create dances for his own company formed in 1954.

Taylor doesn't see himself retiring. When asked why, he said, “I guess it's some kind of addiction to dance.” In his essay, “Why I Make Dances,” he elaborates. “I make dances because I believe in the power of contemporary dance, its immediacy, its potency, its universality. When the dances are good nothing else brings me as much satisfaction.”

His new dance began with an idea about “people who don’t commit themselves to someone in a relationship,” Taylor said.

Reinhart said he’s looking forward to seeing the world premiere of Taylor's “The Uncommitted” today. But at the thought of the honor that comes with it, Reinhart's voice, full of emotion, said he had no words to express his feelings. After a pause, he found some. “I think it’s the ultimate honor from Paul.”