Reinhart honored for contribution to arts

Longtime American Dance Festival director awarded Longleaf Pine

BY SUSAN BROILI
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Just three days after stepping down as American Dance Festival director — a position he held for 43 years — Charles Reinhart sounded overwhelmed by all the honors bestowed upon him during this season's six-weeks festival.

"I've got to get a head reduction tool," Reinhart, 80, said earlier this week in a telephone interview from his New York

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Charles Reinhart smiles under a sign for the American Dance Festival on Duke University's East Campus on Friday.
Reinhart

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apartment. "I have a swelled head from all the praise."

Durham Mayor Bill Bell gave him the key to the city and proclaimed June 9 "Charles Reinhart Day." On behalf of North Carolina Governor Beverly Perdue, North Carolina Arts Council Director Nancy Regan inducted him into the Order of the Longleaf Pine, presented to individuals who have a proven record of extraordinary service to the state.

In a program note, Pilobolus counted him as one of their "dearest Old Friends" since 1972 when the troupe made their debut at ADF, then located in New London, Conn. They thanked him for his candid wisdom and encouragement. "In fact, his unwavering support and friendship has become one of the defining features of our personal and professional lives," they said in the note.

Reinhart recalled some of the surprises. On July 23, the last day of the festival, African American Dance Ensemble director Chuck Davis had invited Reinhart to observe a master class he was teaching. "It turned out to be this big honor, I'm glad of me," Reinhart said.

The flash dance performed by about 40 ADF students and his daughter, Ariane, took him completely by surprise in the lobby during the first intermission on opening night of the Paul Taylor Dance Company at Durham Performing Arts Center. The dance, choreographed by Mark Haim, included some jitterbug moves as well as part of Taylor's "Aureole," the first Taylor dance Reinhart saw that convinced him to take the job as manager of Taylor's company in 1962, thus beginning Reinhart's career in modern dance.

Then, there was THE dance, the world premiere of Taylor's "The Uncommitted," created in honor of Reinhart. Taylor has shied away from honoring people in this way — and had only done so one other time, decades ago, for dance critic Edwin Denby, Reinhart said.

"I felt honored by the quality of the dance. I think it's an extraordinarily good piece," he said. But the content, which deals with loneliness, made him sad. "The older you get, the more potential there is for loneliness," he said of losing close friends and family. Stephanie, his wife and ADF co-director, died at age 58 on Sept. 23, 2002.

He's just begun to reflect on his long career as a champion of modern dance and the people who create it. "I've never looked back before, never considered what I've done but what I've had to do ... Now that I'm 80, I look back and I smile," he said.

But he also thinks about what he didn't do and this provides some balance, he added.

He named two of his "discoveries" in the last decade — choreographers Shen Wei and Rosie Herrera — and believes they will add to our cultural heritage. "Wow! What a way to go out," he said.

Shen formed his company at ADF in 2000 and has appeared at the festival ever since.

Reinhart first saw Herrera's work at the Center for the Arts in Miami and brought her to ADF. "It's there," he said of her talent.

He's happy that this season's fund drive to raise $43,000 — $1,000 for each of his ADF years — was successful so it will be matched and added to the Charles L. and Stephanie Reinhart Fund to continue their work through student scholarships, commissioning new works and other dance projects, he said.

This son of a New Jersey greengrocer also feels fortunate that he's had a career in dance. "We all have these large buttons in our chests and when we're touched by experience, they blossom. And, we call this luck. As a child, any little dance experience stuck with me," he said.

In Ted Steeg's film on Reinhart, shown at the gala that kicked off this year's festival, Reinhart tells the story of how his second-grade class did a rain dance outside — and it rained. "And, I thought, you know, this dance is powerful stuff," he says in the film.

In the future, he'd like to be involved in dance but in different ways. "I'd like to be on the other side of the table and give out the money, maybe for a foundation. My knees are worn out from begging," he said.

While he won't be going to as many dance performances — over the years, he's had to in order to find the talented choreographers — he will continue to see what he wants to see by Paul Taylor, Shen Wei and others, when they perform in New York. In a few days, he plans to attend Eiko & Koma's performance in the fountain at Lincoln Center within walking distance from his apartment, he said.

"I'm going to look for the small happiness," he said of other pursuits that include reading. "I have boxes and boxes of books to sort through and then jump in. I love Russian literature," he said. He won't be reading anything online. "I like to read a real newspaper and turn the pages with my hand," he said.