Jodee Nimerichter, seen here on Tuesday, has been chosen as the new director of the American Dance Festival after the departure of Charles Reinhart, who recently retired at the end of his 43rd season with ADF.

A NEW CHAPTER

American Dance Festival welcomes Jodee Nimerichter as new director

BY SUSAN BROILI
Special to The Herald-Sun

DURHAM — At age 16, when Jack Anderson’s book, “The American Dance Festival,” landed on her parents’ door step, Jodee Nimerichter had no idea that one day she would direct that festival.

Nimerichter, 41, recently took over as ADF director when former director Charles Reinhart retired at the end of his 43rd season.

When the ADF first came to her attention — Anderson’s book was a Book Club selection of the month — she was living in a suburb of Denver, Colo., and was into ballet, not modern dance, she said in a recent interview.

“I grew up as a pretty serious ballet dancer,” Nimerichter

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said. She almost went to a conservatory after high school. But she decided she didn’t want to perform. So, she enrolled at New York University Gallatin School of Individualized Study and majored in performing arts administration. That program required several internships. One was in 1991 at the American Dance Festival’s New York office.

The next year, she was hired as Charles and Stephanie Reinhart’s assistant and eventually became director of international programs until 1997 when she became associate producer of ADF’s Emmy Award-winning “Free to Dance” series. In 1999, she left ADF to work for Dance in America at New York City’s public television station, WNET. There she facilitated the broadcast of “Free to Dance” through 2002. After Stephanie Reinhart’s death in 2002, the ADF invited her back in 2003 as associate director. In 2007, she became co-director.

Now that she’s director, Nimerichter has some ideas for future festivals. “I have a deep passion for expanding community programs on a year-round basis for young people to have the opportunity for exposure to dance,” she said.

She would also like to have more dance companies in residence at the festival. This summer, China’s Tao Dance Theater’s six-weeks residency included performances on ADF’s Reynolds’ Theater ticketed series. Members also took ADF classes. Such residencies allow companies to create work and get feedback without the pressure to produce something for the stage, she added.

She wants the festival to showcase emerging artists in free performances. “This gives a platform for some young artists, who are not yet ready to do their own program, to share their work with the community,” she said.

From Charles Reinhart, she learned things that will serve her well as director, she said. “I learned to really always listen to the artists. If they ask for something, say ‘Why not?’ instead of ‘It’s not possible,’” Nimerichter said.

She also related to Reinhart’s passion for modern dance. “We share that passion to serve the art form. It’s not a learned thing. You either have it or you don’t. That passion gives you the energy and devotion to really want to serve the art form,” she said.

Just the travel time takes a lot of energy. As co-director, she’s already traveled in this country and abroad to scout for talented choreographers. Now, as director, the travel time increases. She has to figure out where she’s going this year but knows she’ll be making two to three trips a month starting in the fall and continuing through January or February, she said.

She also has a family to consider. She and husband Gaspar Louis, a former Pilobolus dancer, have two young children, Dahlia, 3½, and Preston Gaspard, 4½ months. Louis directs the ADF’s creative movement outreach program for young people.

When searching for choreographers to invite to the festival, Nimerichter looks for “new directions, interesting ideas, movement that hasn’t been seen before, overall elements of production,” she said.

Then, there’s the personal response. “At the end of a performance, deep down there’s a visceral feeling. When you’ve been moved like you’ve never been moved before, you never want it to end,” she said. On the other hand, Nimerichter always wants it to end so she can rush out and tell people about it. “When it’s so powerful, you want to share it,” she added.

Since ADF landed on her doorstep in the form of Anderson’s book 25 years ago, Nimerichter has become familiar with every chapter in it. As ADF director, she will, no doubt, add some chapters to the festival’s history starting with the 79th season next summer.