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This costume sketch for "Flora, an Opera" is by director and designer John Pascoe.

Spoleto USA

Get ready for Spoleto



CHRISTINA FIEDLER

Eclectic arts festival reinvents itself – again – for 2010

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South Carolina's world-renowned performance arts festival, Spoleto USA, will turn 34 in 2010, and as is always the case with this eclectic event, the traditional is paired with the unconventional. With offerings ranging from a 300-year-old opera to a German post-punk band, the festival will be a marriage of society matron and reckless rebel.

"I think it's going to be terrific fun," says Nigel Redden, Spoleto's general director.

The expansive program will offer 45 productions from May 28 through June 13.

Year 34's most significant marker has to be the reopening of the restored Dock Street Theatre, closed since 2007, and its featured production, "Flora, an Opera," the first opera ever performed in the American colonies.

Redden says a search into Charleston's early history revealed the city was the opera's first site. Flora's first production at an assembly hall in 1735 proved so successful that the next year it became the curtain raiser for the newly built Dock Street Theatre.

Redden says he's always felt part of the excitement for Spoleto visitors has to do with how much art and culture is woven into the fabric of the city. To carry that idea forward, it seemed appropriate to resurrect the 300-year-old "Flora" at the newly reopened theater.

The opera has been re-orchestrated by composer Neely Bruce — he will also conduct — and restaged by British director John Pascoe, who also designed the sets and costumes.

If you're looking for the fresh and new, you might want to take in the debut of violinist Geoff Nuttal as host and director of the beloved Chamber Music Series, founded by the legendary Charles Wadsworth. For a different mindset, there's Die Roten Punkte, a German post-punk/electro/rock band that grooves cabaret-style.

If laughter is your medicine, consider among the many offerings of mirth Noel Coward's comedy of manners "Present Laughter" and the all-male "Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo" with its goofed-up classical specter.

More opera comes with the first U.S. production of Wolfgang Rihm's "Prosperina," along with another Spoleto first, Haydn's 1773 lavishly costumed "Philemon and Baucis," performed by handcrafted marionettes brought to life by the Colla Marionette Company.

The dance program will include both classical and modern programs, among them the Tbilisi-based troupe, the National Ballet of Georgia, starring legendary ballerina Nina Ananiashvili in the otherworldly "Giselle." On the contemporary side, you'll find Tel Aviv's Inbal Pinto and the Avshalom Pollak Dance Company in "Oyster," a phantasmagoric part dance, part carnival sideshow; the New York-based Gallim Dance with its riveting suite of "I Can See Myself in Your Pupil"; and Lucinda Child's 1979 piece, "Dance," scored by Phillip Glass.

The orchestral offerings will feature Ravel's "La Valse," Richard Strauss' epic masterpiece "Also Sprach Zarathustra" and Beethoven's lighthearted Symphony No. 8, performed by the Spoleto Festival Orchestra under Emmanuel Villaume's direction.

The wide-ranging 2010 program also will feature numerous solo performers as well as a visual arts component in partnership with both the Gibbs Museum of Art and the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.

Tickets go on sale Monday, and can be purchased online at www.spoletousa.org or by phone at 843-579-3100. Beginning April 19, tickets may be purchased in person at the Spoleto USA box office at the Gaillard Municipal Auditorium, 77 Calhoun St., Charleston.