

Editorial COMMENTARY

by Tom Starland, Editor and Publisher

Bring Me the Head of Gian Carlo Menotti

We start this new year out with a trip in the way-back machine for a look at a story I covered in our very first issue of our first arts publication, *Charleston Arts*. I worked on that first issue for six months and after I was done I wondered how I would finish the next one in just one month.

I'm using the title, Bring Me the Head of Gian Carlo Menotti, because this whole thing reminds me of a 70's flick by Sam Peckinpaw, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* - a bloody romp of betrayal and double-crossing over sex and money.

The article was about the presentation of a bust of Gian Carlo Menotti to the City of Charleston, SC, during the 11th Spoleto Festival, in 1987, back when the Festival was a truly comprehensive festival - including visual art presentations organized by Spoleto Festival USA.

Reading back through that article which is offered below, it is plain to see so many changes have taken place since 1987 - that's if you were around in those days.

First, Charleston had an independent arts council. Now the arts community is run by departments of area's city and state governments. It's hard to imagine that a cultural community like Charleston doesn't have an arts council, but it doesn't. Most other big cities in the Carolinas do have an independent arts councils that don't compete with area arts groups by presenting art events, but raise significant funding to support those groups.

Second, back in 1987 Charleston was in love with Gian Carlo Menotti and the Festival that put Charleston back on the world map. But it wouldn't be too long after that when the City would give

Menotti his walking papers from the Festival he founded. That's one reason I've never turned Shoestring Publishing into a non-profit with a board of directors. They would have booted me out years ago too.

Menotti and the Charleston Festival parted ways over the stipulation that Menotti's adopted son take over the Festival's artistic direction after Menotti passed on or retired. Now here's how much things have changed since 1987. Menotti's adopted son was adopted in his 30's. He was possibly Menotti's life partner, but even people as popular as Menotti had to keep things like that in the closet back then - even in Charleston - a place many in South Carolina call Sin-City. Of course, if both were alive today and still together they couldn't get married in South Carolina in 2014.

Somehow Menotti knew he would one day fall out of favor in Charleston - he predicted it during that unveiling of his bust back in 1987.

Now the Spoleto Festival USA is just a performing arts festival that allows the locals to deal with the visual arts. But nothing since Spoleto organized the visual art has attracted the attention of national arts writers and critics.

And, now our current arts publication, *Carolina Arts*, going into its 18th year just covers the visual arts. The performing arts seem to get the bulk of media attention so we dedicated our paper to covering just the visual arts.

Reading that old article really showed how much some things have changed and how much some things stay the same.

We Have A Mystery On Our Hands

Charleston still presents the Spoleto
continued above on next column to the right

Festival USA every year, but what happened to that bust of Menotti - the founder of the Spoleto Festivals, both in Charleston and Italy? The last I heard of it was when someone mentioned that it was discovered in the back of a City closet - with a good bit of dust on it, but that was years ago. I don't know if it ever made it to the Green room at the Dock Street Theater.

Recently I was asked if I knew where it was or what happened to it and I made an inquiry but no one seems to know what happened to it and it can't be found or hasn't been found yet.

And I can't imagine that something so valuable and historic would have just been tossed out in the trash. Not in the city where the arts have been so important for centuries. So where is it?

So I'm asking folks in the Charleston area to ask where Menotti's bust is and that the City of Charleston find it and put it on display in the Green room at the Dock Street Theater.

Menotti may have been a pain in the ass to deal with at times, but Charleston owes him a lot for bringing his festival to America and selecting Charleston to be its second home. The least the City of Charleston can do is find that bust and put it on public display. He could have gone to San Francisco and things would have been a whole lot different than his experience in Charleston. And, things would have been a lot different for Charleston too.

Spread the word around that we want to know where Menotti's bust is - someone knows where it is or knows where they saw it last - a City employee or a past employee. This mystery must be solved.

Here's that article as it appeared in 1987.

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A Gift To The City

On Saturday, May 23, 1987, a small group of people came together at the City of Charleston Council Chambers for an unveiling ceremony. While the second



Bust of Gian Carlo Menotti by Charles C. Parks

day of the voluminous activities of the 11th Spoleto Festival for this city were getting under way, a quiet behind the scenes event was taking place to honor Gian Carlo Menotti, Artistic Director and Founder of Spoleto Festival USA. A bust of Menotti was being presented to the City of Charleston by the Charleston Area Arts Council.



Gian Carlo Menotti (l) gesturing towards the work of artist Charles C. Parks (r) May 1987

The bust was sculpted by Wilmington, Delaware, artist, Charles C. Parks, and made possible by generous contributions by Mr. and Mrs. C. Eugene Bennett of Wilmington, Delaware, Mr. and

continued on Page 5

Glenna Goodacre



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