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Medal of Honor in the Arts Ceremony Honors Those Who Contribute to the Arts

Winthrop University

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Medal of Honor in the Arts Ceremony Honors Those Who Contribute to the Arts

Quick Facts

- During this tenth year for the awards, the university will honor the North Carolina Dance Theatre, musician Charles Wadsworth of New York City, Charleston Mayor Joe Riley Jr. and Christine Fisher of the Arts in Basic Curriculum Project.
- This prestigious award is granted by the College of Visual and Performing Arts to those involved in a cross section of the arts.



NC Dance Theatre



Charles Wadsworth



Mayor Joe Riley Jr.



Christine Fisher

ROCK HILL, S.C. – Winthrop University's **Medal of Honor in the Arts** will celebrate the contributions of a dance theatre, an international artistic director, a visionary S.C. mayor and a state arts advocate during a special evening on March 23.

During this tenth year for the awards, the university will honor the **North Carolina Dance Theatre**, musician **Charles Wadsworth** of New York City, Charleston Mayor Joe Riley Jr. and **Christine Fisher** of the **Arts in Basic Curriculum Project**. First established in 2001, the Medal of Honor in the Arts is not limited to a single arts discipline or area of artistic endeavor. The prestigious award, granted by the College of Visual and Performing Arts, honors those who have encouraged the arts and offered inspiration to others either through their distinguished achievements, artistic excellence, support, or patronage.

The March 23 ceremony is set for 8 p.m. in **Johnson Hall**.

During the event, the award recipients will be honored with performances by faculty and students and given a newly designed medal made by **Plural Studios**. A Medal of Honor scholarship also will be presented during the evening to **Casey Shelton**, a junior art history major from Myrtle Beach, S.C.

More on the honorees:

* The **North Carolina Dance Theatre** was founded in 1970 by Robert Lindgren, former dean of dance at North Carolina School of the Arts. Moved to Charlotte in 1990, the award-winning company now has a new facility (Patricia McBride and Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux Center for Dance) in the uptown area with six dance studios, community and meeting spaces, and a 200-seat performance venue.

Its 21 professional dancers present five performance series each year and offer an education and outreach program that reaches thousands. It has started a groundbreaking community outreach dance program partnership with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Park & Recreation, called NCDT REACH!, to groom talented dancers.

It recently received national critical acclaim after performing at the Kennedy Center's "Ballet Across America" program in Washington D.C. and has been asked to perform again there in 2013.



Casey Shelton



new Medal of Honor

The company's ties to Winthrop's dance program remain strong. In 2009, Dance Theatre presented the ballet *Glass Houses*, a collaboration between Dance Theatre's rehearsal director and choreographer, and a Winthrop professor and sculptor. A dance theatre administrator is a Winthrop alumna, while at least two other faculty members have worked closely with the company.

* **Charles Wadsworth** created the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in 1969, leading it as artistic director and pianist for 20 years and bringing chamber music the unprecedented popularity that it enjoys today. His innovative programming and the varied repertoire he unearthed inspired a new generation of virtuoso musicians to perform chamber music and fostered the creation of chamber music festivals worldwide.

From 1977 to 2010, he was the artistic director and host for the daily Chamber Music Concerts at the Spoleto USA Festival in Charleston, S.C.

A pianist of choice for several illustrious singers, Wadsworth toured as concert partner for 12 seasons with Beverly Sills. At the request of the White House, he has performed for five U.S. presidents: Kennedy, Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan. He now performs widely with his "Charles Wadsworth and Friends" programs, which frequently include violinist Chee-Yun and clarinetist Todd Palmer.

Wadsworth's many honors include The Republic of France's Chevalier in the Order Of Arts and Letters, and Italy's Cavaliere Ufficiale in the Order of Merit. He has received New York City's highest cultural award, the Handel Medallion, in addition to South Carolina's Order of the Palmetto and the Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Award.

* Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. is widely considered one of the most visionary and highly effective governmental leaders in America. First elected mayor in December 1975, he is serving an unprecedented tenth term and has said this will be his last.

Under his leadership, Charleston has increased its commitment to racial harmony and progress; achieved a substantial decrease in crime; experienced a remarkable revitalization of its historic downtown business district; seen the creation and growth of Spoleto Festival U.S. A.; added significantly to the city's park system, including the highly celebrated Waterfront Park; developed nationally-acclaimed affordable housing; and experienced unprecedented growth in Charleston's size and population.

President Barack Obama presented Riley with the 2009 National Medal of the Arts at the White House for cultivating Charleston's historic and cultural resources to enhance public spaces, and for revitalizing urban centers throughout our nation as founder of the Mayors' Institute on City Design.

The American Architectural Foundation and the U. S. Conference of Mayors in February 2010 created The Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Award for Leadership in City Design in his honor. Riley has received the Order of the Palmetto, been named South Carolinian of the Year, and given the 1982 Verner Award by the S.C. Arts Commission for outstanding contributions to the arts.

Riley has received an honorary degree from Winthrop among other South Carolina public institutions.

* **Christine Fisher** grew up in Asheboro, N.C., where in sixth grade she made up her mind that she wanted to be a band teacher. Fast forward to 1998 when she was selected as the South Carolina Teacher of the Year for her work at Southside Middle School in Florence, S.C., representing 47,000 public school teachers in South Carolina. She is the only music teacher ever to hold the honor in the history of the Teacher of the Year program in South Carolina.

Fisher became director of the **Arts in Basic Curriculum Project** at Winthrop in 2001 where she has been influential in helping advocate for the arts across South Carolina.

Last year, she assisted the S.C. Department of Education in revising the South Carolina 2003 Curriculum Guides to correlate with the latest Visual and Performing Arts Achievement Standards. She was selected as member of the Arts Integration Committee of the Arts Schools Network and worked with the Disney Imagineers to develop arts integration sessions at the National Arts Schools Network Conference held at Disney Land.

Fisher is president elect of the Southern Division of the National Association for Music Education (formerly MENC) and was inducted into the S.C. Music Education Association Hall of Fame. She received the Life Time Achievement Award from the SC Theatre Association and the S.C. Verner Award for Arts Education. (Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts), as well as the President's Award for the South Carolina Dance Association.

Fisher also has been a clarinetist in the Florence Symphony Orchestra for 34 years.

More on the newly created medal:

Plural Studios is a design collaboration between husband and wife team, **Michael Gayk** and Courtney Starrett. They create unique wearable and sculptural objects inspired by nature and architecture on a micro-level, with a focus on transitions, connections, intersections and details.

Starrett is originally from Kansas, while Gayk hails from upstate New York. They became a team in 2005 while living and teaching in Michigan. Starrett joined the faculty at Winthrop University in 2006 and is currently associate professor of jewelry and metals. In 2007 Gayk left a position at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to join his wife in Rock Hill and is currently instructor of digital design at York Technical College.

Individually and together, their work has been featured in the books **500 Plastic Jewelry Designs**, **500 Necklaces** and in and on the cover of **Metalsmith magazine**. They have been in numerous exhibitions; juried, invitational and solo. They have been awarded many grants and awards, including a recent **Mecklenburg County Arts and Science Council Grant**.

For more information about **Medal of Honor in the Arts** contact **Amanda Stewart**, Office of Development, at 803/323-4493.

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