



FOR RELEASE AFTER WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 8th:

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South Dakota Shakespeare Festival Sets Forth Exciting News for the 2024 Season!

South Dakota Shakespeare Festival (SDSF) is thrilled to bring big news for the 2024 season! To begin, SDSF will perform *The Merchant of Venice* for their 2024 summer season. This powerful story blends romance, comedy, and suspense with cultural conflicts that still live with us today. The characters of Shylock and Portia are two of the strongest and most memorable in the canon. Dr. Ralph Cohen, co-founder of The American Shakespeare Center, referred to these two by saying they are, “two brilliant but flawed poles of this face-off between the Old Testament (law) and the New Testament (love).” In addition to offering such a powerful production, SDSF has other surprises for South Dakota audiences. As always, the production and all SDSF events are provided free of charge.

This summer SDSF will see the return of their Founding Artistic Director to the stage in the pivotal role of Shylock. Chaya Gordon-Bland began SDSF in 2011 in collaboration with founding Production Manager, Scott Mollman, and Founding Executive Director, Greg Huckabee, and served as the Artistic Director through the 2022 season. Her passion and work brought free professional Shakespeare to countless patrons and youth across the state. When asked what most inspired her to take on this role, she told us, “It’s actually quite difficult to find words for how salient this opportunity and production are at this particular moment in global politics and societal relations. This is a crucial moment for examining prejudice and bigotry,

attending to how we perceive and respond to ‘otherness’, and facilitating honest and meaningful dialogue about how we can work together to foster understanding, respect, appreciation, civility and true bonds across cultures and communities. Theatre as a whole and this Shakespeare play, in particular, are uniquely situated to help us navigate through such challenging issues and conversations, create compassionate spaces for processing nuanced, ambivalent, complex, and difficult emotions, and ultimately develop a richer understanding and experience of our shared humanity.” Rebecca Bailey the current SDSF Executive Artistic Director and director of the 2024 season shared, “Bringing together this creative team, this story, and our audiences is the right conversation, the right time, and the right vehicle to remind us to connect, to laugh, and to value the universal humanity we share. Having Chaya share this process is both an honor and central to us bringing this story forward.”

The South Dakota Shakespeare Festival is also building on its mission to bring free, professional Shakespeare to the region. This summer will mark an exciting first collaboration with The North Dakota Shakespeare Festival. NDSF has been providing innovative productions and education out of Grand Forks, ND since 2017. Founder and Artistic Director Stephanie Faatz Murry is “thrilled to enter this new partnership with SDSF. Our communities share many similarities, and we strongly believe that sharing organizational resources will only bring a higher caliber of production value to our stages.” “I know she is a passionate, driven individual and that her leadership of NDSF values the same vital mission as SDSF. Collaborating and sharing resources allows both of us to expand our missions of providing free, inclusive, and professional Shakespeare to the rural Dakotas.” SDSF offers a week of festivities in Vermillion, SD including the production *The Merchant of Venice*, *Bark with the Bard* (our dog-inspired 5K), and many of the other events from last year bringing an action-packed festival week. In addition to the family events, SDSF will provide educational and outreach events in the region, free of cost. South Dakota Shakespeare Festival will host events from Sunday, June 2nd to Sunday, June 9th with the production running Thursday- Sunday. See you at the park!

To get more information about the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival’s activities for 2024, including dates, times, locations, and details, be sure to visit www.sdshakespearefestival.org or check us out on Facebook.