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Friday night the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival hosted the annual Wine with Will event to raise money for the nonprofit organization. The event featured wine, hors d'oeuvres, music and student actors performed Shakespearean monologues. Peyton Beyers | The Volante

'Wine with Will' raises money for South Dakota Shakespeare Festival

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Since 2012, the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival has hosted the annual Wine with Will event, an evening dedicated to supporting this nonprofit organization and the arts.

Wine with Will began Friday evening with musical stylings by the Queen’s Pleasure, a local woodwinds group that set the ambiance for the event.

Throughout the evening, there were monologues performed by actors, short presentations, a silent auction and wine pairings with hors d’oeuvres.

Chaya Gordon-Bland, co-founder of the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival and managing artistic director, said the Wine with Will event has gained popularity each year.

“It grows every year,” Gordon-Bland said. “One of the things that’s super exciting about this year is that we actually think we’re going to have our largest attendance yet this year. Word’s getting out and there’s excitement and momentum.”

Gordon-Bland said the members of the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival put in a lot of work to the Wine with Will event to make it have a higher class feel.

“The event itself is a higher line item fundraiser,” Gordon-Bland said. “It’s a great way to bring together people who support the arts. It’s also kind of a celebration of the arts in general, culinary arts, the art of wine, actors and musicians.”

Throughout the evening, student actors from the USD Theater Department performed Shakespearean monologues for the crowd.

Senior musical theater major Rachel Smith performed a monologue from Shakespeare's "As You Like It." Smith said she was excited to be a part of Wine with Will.

"It's not very often that you get to do a Shakespearean monologue with people standing right around you," Smith said. "There's usually this awful gap between the audience and the performer, so I'm excited to just be among the people."

Smith said she came to USD mainly looking to participate in musical theater, after being exposed to Shakespeare, she was ready to try something new.

"Throughout my classes here, I took a Shakespeare class with Chaya Gordon-Bland and I fell in love with Shakespeare," Smith said. "Last summer, I was in the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival's production of 'Richard III', so she thought it would be cool for me to come in and do a performance tonight."

Wine with Will raises money for the annual South Dakota Shakespeare Festival in Prentis Park. This summer, the festival will be June 6-9 and consist of a cast of actors from all over the country performing a new rendition of "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

Scott Mollman, director of operations and production for the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival, said the fundraiser is a great way to bring the community together to support the arts.

"This is our biggest fundraiser of the year," Mollman said. "It allows us to keep everything free in the park. It's fun to see everybody get excited about it. This is kind of a smaller thing compared to the festival. It's fun to see everybody show up and have a good time."

After the money is raised at Wine with Will, it's time to prepare for the summer festival. The South Dakota Shakespeare Festival brings out actors from across the country and starts rehearsing a month before the festival.

Gordon-Bland said organizing and putting on the festival is time-consuming, but rewarding.

"It's a lot of work and a lot of time, but theater has such amazing potential to have so much positive impact on our communities and telling stories and bringing people together," Gordon-Bland said. "It feels like a really important gift that we can share."