

Looking Forward To South Dakota Shakespeare Festival 2024

Bailey Gives Glimpse of What's In Store

By Sarah Wetzel for the *Plain Talk* Mar 15, 2024

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Exciting things are in the works for the South Dakota Shakespeare Festival, according to the new Executive Artistic Director, Rebecca Bailey.

Bailey spoke at the Vermillion Rotary Club meeting on Feb. 28 to share both a report of last year's activities and a glimpse of what to expect this year.

Last year's program was influenced in part by a change in leadership.

"[Chaya Gordon-Bland] stepped down in the fall of 2022 and I took over and so we had sort of a shortened program last year," she said. "It was sort of a love letter to all of the shows that we've done with some of the best scenes in Shakespeare represented."

Other activities accompanied the program aimed at incorporating as many different parts of the community and demographics as possible.

Bailey said the aim this year is to keep as much of the previous programs as possible while bringing back a full scale production, all which can be enjoyed for free.

This year's full-scale production is the "Merchant of Venice," which will have a cast of 12.

SDSF has received over 200 applications from across the country.

"This one production I have been in love with since I first saw it at the American Shakespeare Center," she said. "What I loved about it is that it had heart, it had humanity really at the center of it but it had romance and it had comedy and it had that moment where I was hanging on the edge of my seat about what was going to happen and it's something I'm so excited to share with this community."

Bailey shared part of the festival's mission statement.

"SDSF is built to engage, connect and inspire communities by exploring our shared human



South Dakota Shakespeare Festival Executive Artistic Director Rebecca Bailey addresses Vermillion Rotarians in late February. She shared information about what's planned for the festival this summer. Courtesy Of Vermillion Rotary Club

experiences through inclusive, professional Shakespeare productions and theatre arts education," she said. "We aren't just about the performance. We're about education. We are about professional Shakespeare. We're about the fact that this has been bringing people together for over 400 years. These stories encapsulate something about what it is to be in this human, humanity and what it is that all of us share together."

Bailey shared how meaningful outdoor theatre can be for audience members and performers.

Originating at the famous Globe Theater, audience members of different social classes came to enjoy productions without any special lighting or special effects.

"Without any lighting they watch me and I watch them," she said. "I see them, they're not in a dark set-aside place and they watch each other watch the show...there's something very different about that interaction and it shares what it is for us all to be human. It makes it alive. It makes it something

that's a collective experience. I don't sit in my dark space and watch it and Shakespeare is a master act and that's what I'm excited to be able to bring and continue to be a part of this community."

In addition to the program last year, the community enjoyed activities such as "Shakespeare in Love" playing at the Coyote Twin Theater, Shakespeare Trivia at The Brick House, Adult Shakespeare Improv at The Varsity and Hip Hop Shakespeare with the Sonnet Man.

The Sonnet Man, also known as Devon Glover, was a big hit.

"Not only did he have the chance to perform his hip-hop Shakespeare, he takes sonnets and he does the sonnet as it was written and then he rewrites it in his own words," Bailey said. "It was wonderful to watch him with audiences."

She said that Glover also did a talk-back as well as a class at the Juvenile Detention Center in Sioux Falls.

"That young man walked in and he had their attention," Bailey said. "He pulled out the rap music and he was sort of jamming with it and then he had them writing their own sonnets. We had a really great time and they listened."

"Bark with the Bard" was also on the list of activities last year and she said they have every intention of bringing it back.

"The dogs enjoyed every minute of it," Bailey said. "The point of all this is that maybe not every event is for you but there is an event for everyone... We want this festival to really take a part of the whole community."

She said the festival takes steps to ensure activities are accessible for everyone.

The show is filmed and can be watched from anywhere the week after the show, according to Bailey. Last year the cast also took scenes to a care center.

They also had educational programming for at-risk youth in the Upward Bound program.

"We talked about moving and what it changed and how the way we moved in the space changed how we perceived each other and how we could control that and how my voice sounded and we listened to each other and we made discoveries," Bailey said. "It's an amazing thing to watch them start to just even have a moment of discovery."

The Upward Bound day also included a career panel with a New York actor talking about what an acting career looks like as well as the education and choices that got them there.

"It's really important conversations and physical chances to work through that space," she said.

Bailey said the full 2024 Shakespeare Festival schedule should be out within the next month and she couldn't be more excited.

"The world climate and the world we live in can always use a reminder about what it is that makes us all human, what it is that being in space together when we see each other and we share things and we share an evening together, what it is that connects each and every one of us," she said. "That's why I keep doing this and that's why I'm so thrilled to be a part of a community that comes together, a community that takes care of each other and the kind of community that I was so fortunate to live in in my time here."

Bailey heartily thanked the Vermillion community for standing behind SDSF for years and encouraged continued volunteer efforts and support.

"SDSF doesn't exist without this community coming together to enjoy it and to take care of the little things..." she said "I ask that you continue to do that. I give a thank you for each of the things that you've done and for the families that have continued to support us and we're not done."

For more information visit www.sdshakespearefestival.org.