ARTS

Record-breaking crowd at WSU ArtsGala raises at least $150,000 to support scholarship program

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Imagine feasting on herb-roasted lamb lollipops, rosemary smashed potatoes, sun-dried tomato polenta with fontina while listening to the beautiful sounds of chamber music.

That was just one of many blended arts and culinary experiences enjoyed by the record-breaking crowd at Wright State University’s 15th Annual ArtsGala on Saturday, April 12, at the university’s Creative Arts Center.
This black-tie event attended by about 700 Wright State students, faculty and staff, sponsors and community members offered the opportunity to enjoy food, drinks and dessert while being entertained by music of all forms, dance, theater and more. Attendees traveled to different themed rooms throughout the evening to sample dishes while watching a performance and got to bid on more than 100 items up for auction.

“This event is unique in the country. No other program puts on a collaboration like this. Hundreds of students put together this event, which has raised more than $1.75 million over 15 years. It is the event in town,” said W. Stuart McDowell, chair and artistic director of WSU’s Department of Theatre, Dance and Motion Pictures.

All proceeds support a scholarship program for students in art, music, theater, dance and film. While the final total for this year’s event is not in yet, it is expected to be at least $150,000, according to Wright State officials.
Wright State University students perform excerpts from “Les Miserables” during the Arts Gala on Saturday, April 12. The annual fundraiser was expected ... Read More

“Tonight is all about our students, and your participation generates scholarships for these amazing students. You will see many talented students tonight,” Wright State’s President David R. Hopkins told the crowd as the event began.

To put an event like this together, hundreds of people work year-round to plan every detail, from the menu, to sponsorships and marketing, to entertainment and logistics, said Jennie Buckwalter, assistant dean for community and student engagement for the College of Liberal Arts. Students play a big part.

“These students rehearse for weeks in advance to put on this show, while juggling their school work. They won’t put on a show that’s anything less than the best. They are so encouraged to have community support. They get the opportunity to intermingle, and that’s beneficial on both ends. They get to network with patrons, and patrons get to talk to them and learn about the students and their hopes and dreams,” Buckwalter said.

Related Gallery
During the gala, Kate Berger was displaying her sculpting talent, as she was shaping a figure out of clay in the sponsors’ reception room.

“This is my first ArtsGala. I’m really excited to be here. I’m a scholarship winner, and it’s just amazing that all of these people care about the arts and want to come out and see us and support us,” said Berger, who is working on a bachelor of arts degree with a concentration in painting.

Senior vocal major Tori Adams performed with her partner, Jarrod Davis, in the Café Jazz et Danse. “This event is everything to the students,” said Adams, a recipient of the ArtsGala Scholarship. “Without it, I wouldn’t be here.”

Senior music major and scholarship recipient Doug Lane also credits the scholarship with affording him opportunities he never would have had otherwise. “The ArtsGala means the ability to come here to Wright State University. It wouldn’t have been possible (for me) to be here for the last two years without it.”

Other student performances included scenes from the recent sold-out theater run of “Les Miserables” as well
as Mozart’s opera “The Magic Flute.”

The “Les Mis” performance brought the crowd to their feet.

“I’ve been working on this show for months,” said Lexi Muller, stage manager for the production. The sophomore is working toward a degree in technical theater with a focus on stage management. “Tonight is the icing on the cake.”

Sitting beside Muller during the production was theater technology and lighting senior, Erin Jones, who designed and ran the lighting for the show. “It’s nice to be able to help fellow students,” Jones said.

Other highlights included a Student Film Festival, an exhibition featuring the work of senior art majors, wind symphony, multiple dance floors for students and guests, live artistic creations by student artists and a chamber orchestra and dance performance as well as themed rooms featuring music and dance. For example, the Rainbow Room featured student impersonators of Ella Fitzgerald, Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Mel Torme and Rosemary Clooney. The menu in this room included a meatball bar.

Looking at the electric guitar autographed by country music superstar Brad Paisley in the silent auction room that offered hundreds of items was Lori Ohlmann and her father, Walter Ohlmann, CEO and president of the Ohlmann Group. “We support (the ArtsGala) because they deserve it. The kids are fantastic,” said Lori Ohlmann, senior vice president of account services at the Dayton marketing firm. “The arts are really important to the community. We’re lucky to have what we have, and we need to keep it here.”

In a single academic year, the College of Liberal Arts produces six plays; hosts regular arts exhibits in the Stein Galleries; presents weekly music concerts and recitals; stages two opera performances; offers three dance concerts; and organizes the ArtsGala fundraiser, the Holidays in the Heartland celebration and the Big Lens Film Festival. To learn more about the program, visit www.wright.edu/cola.

A $22.75 million renovation and expansion of The Creative Arts Center officially kicked off the day prior to the gala. The project includes renovating existing classrooms, studio spaces, labs and shared centers as well as creating a new home for the Robert and Elaine Stein Galleries. Construction is expected to be complete by the 2016-17 school year, Hopkins said.

Presenting sponsors of the ArtsGala were Barnes & Noble and Morris Home Furnishings. Major sponsors included Emerson Climate Technologies, Gloria and Don Graber, Horan, Wright State University Hospitality Services, ThinkTV, Dayton Daily News and WHIO-TV.

**WSU ARTSGALA IN PHOTOS**

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