Wright State Musical Theatre students entertain at the annual Arts Gala. Here, they perform songs from “Les Miserables.” This year they’ll perform selections from the spring musical “Peter Pan.” CONTRIBUTED

Arts Gala spotlight shines on students

Festive event provides scholarships for Wright State arts students.

By Meredith Moss
Staff Writer

If your image of a community fundraiser is a dinner/dance where you’re seated at a table with eight others for the entire evening, you’ll have to revise that concept when it comes to Wright State University’s annual Arts Gala.

The lively event, slated for March 28, has raised more than $1.75 million for arts scholarships during its 15-year history, and it’s all accomplished with a unique twist.

The event showcases student performances in theater, dance, motion pictures, music and visual arts and guests

HOW TO GO
What: Wright State University Arts Gala featuring five themed dining areas and student performances in theater, dance, motion pictures, music and visual arts.
When: 6:30 p.m. to midnight, March 28
Where: Creative Arts Center, Wright State University
Dress: Black-tie optional
Tickets: $200 each. Order by calling 937-775-5512 or visiting wright.edu/arts gala. Reservations may be made through noon on March 27.

spend the night moving from one area to another enjoying food and entertainment.

Arts Gala continued on E2
Arts Gala

continued from E1

You might step into a theater to watch a scene from the spring musical, "Peter Pan," interact with a student artist creating a sculpture, view a student film, listen to a chamber orchestra, or watch an opera excerpt from "Pirates of Ponzance."

By the time the night is over, you'll have seen exactly where your ticket money is going: to ensure that Wright State arts students can complete their education.

The evening spotlights the Department of Art and Art History, School of Music, and the Department of Theatre, Dance and Motion Pictures.

The party's unusual format incorporates five different themed rooms for dining with different entertainment in each.

The evening, presented by the College of Liberal Arts, also includes a cigar and sports tent, wine tasting, bourbon tasting and martini lounge, and a silent auction including artwork by Wright State faculty, students and alumni.

Theater student Meredith Zahn, whose talents will be on display at the event, is just one of the 70-80 students who have benefited from the special evening.

"My parents were very smart and planned well for the future of my brothers and me, but they couldn't foresee the enormous medical expenses that came along with my brothers being diagnosed with growth hormone deficiency," she says.

"This cost my parents all of our college funds as well as their retirement fund, and with my father being offered his dream of buying a business at the same time all three kids were in college," she added, "no one in my family knew what to do."

The ArtsGala Scholarship, she says, has given her the opportunity to pursue her dream.

Jennifer Buckwalter, assistant dean for community and student engagement for the College of Liberal Arts, has been coordinating the event for 10 years and says more than 700 typically attend.

What's unusual about the dressy gala, she says, is that it brings together all of the fine and performing arts and the faculty, staff and students and gets them collaborating on one big project.

The goal has always been to showcase the talented arts students and raise scholarship funds.

"The dedication these arts students have to giving to perfecting their craft means many hours in the studio, in rehearsal and practice rooms," Buckwalter explains.

"For these students, trying to have part-time jobs can be really difficult so these scholarships are absolutely critical in order to keep them on track for graduating on time and graduating with a lot less debt," she added.

A year's tuition typically runs about $8,700.

Buckwalter says the school doesn't want its arts program to be a well-kept secret.

They're hoping folks in the community will be inspired by the gala to come to a show or exhibition throughout the year.

This year's theme, "Under Construction," highlights the major modernization and expansion project for the Creative Arts Center projected to be done at the end of 2016.

"We'll be renovating existing spaces and adding footage to the front of the building which will include a new art gallery, a new dance studio and other new spaces," Buckwalter explains.

"This year's gala will be the last time people will see the Creative Arts Center as they know it. By the 2016 Gala significant aspects of the project will be complete and unveiled to the public."

Contact this reporter at 937-225-2440 or email MeredithMoss@coxinc.com.