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# MSU students eager to perform Rent

Written by Cyndi Lieske

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Last year, when offered a chance to perform *Rent*, the Michigan State University Theatre Department was quick to bump another show for the rock opera about artists living in New York City at the turn of the century.

"We had a totally different show in this spot," said Kirk Domer, MSU Theatre Department acting chair and set designer for *Rent*. "I can't even tell you what it was anymore. We were on a waiting list (for *Rent*.) You know as soon as *Rent* comes out on a college campus they want to see shows like this. We got an e-mail from Music Theatre International saying, 'The royalties have been released for *Rent*.' We had a secretary call that morning and reserve the rights."

Writer Jonathon Larson, who died on the eve of *Rent*'s first performance, said his rock opera was "about a community celebrating life in the face of death and AIDS at the turn of the century."

Based on Giacomo Puccini's *La Boheme*, *Rent* was awarded the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, four Tony awards, including best Musical and Best Score, and numerous other drama awards.

When auditions for *Rent* and two other performances were scheduled, more than 200 students showed up for a shot at being cast.

The challenge with staging *Rent*, Domer said, is to create a set design that recalls the grubby street scenes and warehouse apartments that dominate the dynamic musical. In late October 2009, Domer began meeting with Alison Dobbins and others to begin designing the set. Dobbins had recently been hired as an assistant professor of integrated performance media design and Domer was eager to get her help with the show.

"That really affected how we were going to approach this production," Domer said. "A lot the storytelling of what happens is through this video artist. It is about him videoing the lives of his friends."

Dobbins headed to New York City during MSU's spring break to film street scenes to use in the production. Her images will be projected on a variety of backdrops during the performances.

"I've developed a world of New York City streets, construction and warehouse interiors on multiple levels, so that we have a series of projection surfaces that are not projector screens," Domer said. "These people are bohemians; they don't have a \$50,000 projector screen in their apartments. They project on

## **Rent**

Pasant Theatre MSU, East Lansing  
April 16-18, 21-25, performances at 8 p.m., 2 p.m.  
\$20, \$15 for students  
[whartoncenter.com](http://whartoncenter.com), (517) 432-2000

the wall. They project on the shower curtains. They project on the floor, so the idea was to create this sort of bohemian jungle of New York City that could have projected subways as transitions and projected people walking on the streets."

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