

## MSU brings technologically enhanced 'Tommy' to the stage

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EAST LANSING, Mich. — Using new technology to breathe life into a relatively “old” show, Michigan State University’s Department of Theatre will present an updated version of the rock opera “Tommy,” complete with digitally created scenery and the hero playing a pinball version of Wii.

The production, which will begin its 10-day run April 9 in the MSU Concert Auditorium, is one of the “most ambitious” productions the department has ever undertaken, said Kirk Domer, an assistant professor of theater who is coordinating the visual scene design.

“This is the most ambitious show we’ve done in terms of technology and numbers of people in the production,” he said. “This is going to be a completely unique experience for the audience.”

Students and faculty from MSU’s Department of Telecommunication, Information Studies and Media worked with the theater department to create scenery that not only is behind the actors on stage, but envelops them as well.

“The audience will see virtual scenery that moves and transforms the environment,” Domer said. “The actors will be encapsulated within the world. The stage will never look the same.”

In perhaps the most famous scene of the production in which Tommy – the deaf, dumb and blind kid who “sure plays a mean pinball” – plays his game, the traditional pinball game has become a more visually appealing Wii game.

“Pinball has become somewhat antiquated in today’s society,” said director Rob Roznowski, also an assistant professor of theater. “So we were looking for the natural equivalent to what we could do for a contemporary audience. And that type of gaming is what we thought Tommy would be playing now.”

The original Tommy, written by Peter Townshend and performed by his band the Who, made its debut in 1973. Since then it has appeared on the stage and in film.

In the story, Tommy, as a young child, is so traumatized at witnessing the murder of his father that he becomes deaf, dumb and blind. He soon finds he has a talent for playing pinball, something that leads him to fame and fortune.

Roznowski said he is confident the use of today’s technology does nothing but enhance the story.

“This story needed to be told with this technology,” he said. “Because of the use of Wii gaming, because of the media’s influence in today’s society, it really became much more about how false celebrities can be lionized by the media.”

Beginning April 9 and running through April 19, “Tommy” will be presented Wednesday through Sunday at the MSU Concert Auditorium. Tickets may be purchased at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts box office.

For performance times, go [here \[http://theatre.msu.edu/Productions/Shows/Sp2009-Tommy/\]](http://theatre.msu.edu/Productions/Shows/Sp2009-Tommy/).

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Here an actor poses in front of digital scenery in the production of “Tommy.” Photo courtesy of MSU Department of Theatre

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