



Collaborators from MSU's Department of Theatre Help Bring Musical to Texas Stage

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Four collaborators from Michigan State University's [Department of Theatre](#) have teamed up to help bring the world premiere of *MacGyver: The Musical* to Stages in Houston, Texas.

Kirk Domer, Professor of Scene Design at MSU, is the scene designer for the production. MSU alumna Kristina Ortiz Miller is the costume designer and is being helped by Mona Jahani, an MFA student at MSU, who is the production's assistant costume designer. Another MSU alumna, T'nia Burse, is the assistant paint charge.



Kirk Domer (left) and Kristina Ortiz Miller (right) on the *MacGyver: The Musical* set

MacGyver: The Musical is adapted from the TV drama, *MacGyver*, and is a rock-n-roll musical comedy set in 1989 East Berlin. The production offers a unique, interactive experience where the lead character, MacGyver, is performed by someone selected from the audience each night.

This world-premiere production is constantly being modified throughout all stages of the production, including the script, the music, and the characters, which requires extra flexibility from Miller as the costume designer, a skill she learned while she was completing her MFA in Theatrical Production Design at MSU.

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Mona Jahani, MFA student

“This kind of production requires a huge amount of collaboration and flexibility,” Miller said. “One of my favorite classes as a grad student at MSU was a collaboration class taught by Kirk Domer and Rob Roznowski. That class taught me so much about how to collaborate with a group of creative individuals and how to really listen to what other artists are bringing to the table.”

As the assistant costume designer working alongside Miller, Jahani took the lead on executing wig designs for the production. Since characters fall under the punk aesthetic, creating the wigs provided Jahani hands-on experience with dying, cutting, and styling according to the punk aesthetic.

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Mona Jahani at Stages in Houston, Texas

Through her work on *MacGyver: The Musical*, Jahani has learned how vital it is to constantly communicate when collaborating with other members of the team, since each day there are new developments during the production process. The production also has given her the opportunity to observe theatre outside a

graduate school setting, contribute to the design of a show, build her professional resume, and make connections.

“One of my favorite parts of working on this production has been the opportunity to work with Mona Jahani. This is the first time I have had an MSU assistant in residency and having Mona with me was great,” Miller said. “It’s such a great opportunity for Mona, as a graduate student, to work on a world premiere in a professional environment with people she has never met before. It was a privilege getting to work with and mentor a current MSU grad. Her work on this show was invaluable to me.”

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Kristina Ortiz Miller, MSU Theatre alumna



For Burse, her time at MSU was spent building and painting in the scene shop with faculty and students. This experience allowed her to find her passion, learn the trade, and dive deep into hands-on experiences that prepared her to pick up a paintbrush anytime, anywhere, which was the case for *MacGyver: The Musical*.

“The best part of this opportunity was getting to jump back into what I am passionate about again,” Burse said. “Obviously with COVID-19, this is a trade that has mostly remained at a pause, so it was fulfilling to make art and connect with MSU faculty and alumni once again.”

Although Burse and Jahani are newcomers to Stages, this is Miller’s 6th show and Domer’s 9th show with the company. They started their freelancing gigs with the company in 2013 after they reconnected with another MSU Department of Theatre alumna, Jessica (Cole) Mullins, and her husband, Michael Mullins, another former MSU student, both of whom were working at the theatre at the time.

T’nia Burse working on the *MacGyver: The Musical* set.

Throughout the years, Domer has made it his goal to integrate experiential opportunities for students like Jahani to get involved in the production process. Each production Domer has been involved with has included an MSU student assistant, three of whom were first prize winners in the Humanities & Performance Arts Category at the MSU Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum. For *MacGyver: The Musical*, there was not only an MSU student to collaborate with, but an entire Spartan family.

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Kirk Domer, Professor of Scene Design

“It never ceases to amaze me that the hardworking Spartan spirit of our students is openly welcomed by the resident production team members who have been working together previously,” Domer said. “Having students (and sometimes alumni) join me on professional gigs is always a mutually beneficial experience, and over the years, Stages has worked to build a student assistant into my design agreement — experiential learning in action.”

Performances of *MacGyver: The Musical* are scheduled for February 4-March 4, 2022, at the Stages in Houston, Texas. For more information, see the [Stages website](#).