

MSU and Williamston Theatre keep the arts thriving through collaboration

By [Lily Cole](#) | November 7, 2025

Just miles off Michigan State University's campus, Williamston Theatre has become a place for MSU theater students to thrive; offering opportunities through its collaboration with the university to participate in shows, pursue apprenticeships and explore creative outlets.

"We get to offer opportunities to students to come and get their first professional credit as a designer, or as an Equity actor, or as an assistant to the stage manager," said Tony Caselli, one of four founders of Williamston Theatre.

Williamston Theatre began with the founders: Caselli, John

Lepard, Chris Purchis and Emily Sutton-Smith. According to Caselli, talk about starting a theatre in Williamston began in 2004, with production officially beginning in 2006.

Growing up in a small town, Caselli said all the founders are fans of theaters in smaller communities.

"I really believe that the people in these parts of the country have just as much of a right – and at least as much of a need – for exposure to the arts as people in big cities," Caselli said.

The theater's collaboration with MSU began when Lepard, an MSU theatre program alum, visited to announce the launch of a new professional theater company, sparking connections with MSU's interim chairperson of the theater program and set design professor, Kirk Domer, as well as professor of acting and directing, Rob Roznowski.

"That was the beginning – we talked, we got to know each other, and we really connected," Domer said.

Domer and Roznowski became early contributors, helping to create opportunities for students to work professionally on stage and backstage. Domer has been around since the beginning of Williamston Theatre, designing for them every year except the first.



Michigan State acting senior Karam Mawazini and Williamston Theater actor John Lepard rehearse for their upcoming play "A Sherlock Carol" in the Auditorium Building in East Lansing, Michigan on Oct. 28, 2025.

— Photo by Rachel Lewis | The State News

Williamston's collaboration with the MSU Department of Theatre goes beyond offering students professional credits.

"It's a nice give and take," Caselli said. "We also get to work with faculty... and sometimes we'll go and direct a show at MSU or teach a class."

"We've done shows where we've brought in experts from MSU's English or Women's Studies departments, or student groups connected to the themes of the plays," he added.

MSU alum Sophia Psiakis, who graduated with a bachelor's in acting, first got started with Williamston through Roznowski, with whom they took classes during their time at MSU.

"He was directing a show at the Williamston the summer after I was set to graduate... I auditioned and ended up getting the part," they said. "So that was the first time I got

The show was "Be Here Now" where Psiakis played Luanne. The show is a dramedy about a woman who experiences flashes of beauty in the world due to a brain tumor. Psiakis said the main character has to decide whether to get it removed or live out her final months enjoying life.

"I got to sit back and watch everybody and get a taste of what professionals do in a theater setting... these are people who've been doing it for decades," Psiakis said. "It was really cool to see their process."

For B Beethem, an MSU alum who graduated with a bachelor's in stage management, Williamston and the people there made them come back and keep coming back.

Beethem currently works as an apprentice through the theater's apprenticeship program. This means they work on every show.

"I help with the build of the actual sets, hanging lights, building maintenance, upkeep... It's a fairly well-rounded position," Beethem said.

Another stage management alum, Jen Lowe, first got started with Williamston Theatre after reaching out to Caselli for an opportunity to work on a show. Her first show was "Wild Horses," a one-woman show.

"Working on a one-woman show taught me to slow down a bit – it wasn't about spectacle or big technical elements," Lowe said. "It was about storytelling. It was fun and exciting and new because I got to see how theater works at a smaller regional professional scale."

The newest show, "A Sherlock Carol," is a "huge collaborative show for us" Caselli said. "We've got MSU faculty, students and professionals all working together."

The show itself is a blend of a classic Christmas tale and a Sherlock Holmes mystery. When a grown-up Tiny Tim asks Sherlock Holmes to solve the mysterious death of Ebenezer Scrooge, the detective uncovers a dark Christmas Eve haunted by the ghosts of the past, present and future.

Directed by Roznowski, the show features four undergraduates – two actors and two understudies – and an undergraduate designer, plus faculty directors and designers.

The show runs Nov. 13 to Dec. 21, 2025. For more information about Williamston Theatre, visit <https://www.williamstontheatre.org/>.