

The State News

URL: http://www.stateneews.com/index.php/article/2009/11/wharton_takes_new_spin_on_cuckoo

Current Date: Thu, 19 Nov 2009 08:00:43 -0500

Wharton takes new spin on 'Cuckoo'

By [Carter Moulton](#) (Last updated: 10 hours ago)

One flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo's nest ... and one flew over East Lansing this weekend.

The MSU Department of Theatre's production of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" opened Tuesday night at the Pasant Theatre in the Wharton Center's Pasant Theatre and will continue to run through Monday.

The play is based on Ken Kesey's novel of the same name, and Dale Wasserman penned the script in 1963 to bring the characters to life in a theatrical production. Miloš Forman then directed a 1975 film adaptation starring Jack Nicholson as Randle P. McMurphy, a newly admitted inmate to an insane asylum — whether he's insane or not is worth discussion. McMurphy's effect on the atmosphere of the mental clinic and its patients is contrasted against the strict conservatism of the institution's ward, Nurse Ratched.

To properly prepare for their roles, the cast worked with psychology professionals to create case studies for each character. They also took part in group and individual therapy sessions in character.

"Because you want authenticity in the show, and part of the joy I get out of it is the research, right here on campus we had a lot of people willing to help out on the show," Director Rob Roznowski said. "They would come in and write case studies for the actors and the actors would do research. They would talk about what life was like in institutions at the time."

The production's set is distinct, transforming the theater into a mental institution. Translucent hospital curtains create a hallway lined with patient's rooms and a control booth jets out into the audience. The floors are rusted tile and lie beneath cots and surgical beds. Rob Odorisio, scene designer for the production, worked collaboratively with Roznowski on the design.

As for inspiration for the custom control booth, Odorisio draws a parallel between mental institutions and prisons.

"Rob really felt strongly about trying to put it somewhere in the audience, and, I — as a designer — love looking through things, having a sense of backgrounds, midgrounds and foregrounds," Odorisio said. "Having it up in the air as if they're looking out and watching over — almost like prison watch towers if you would — sort of inspired us to do that. It also created a very strong line with the hallway and the curtains."

Windows line stage right, where off-stage lighting pierces through them to simulate the hues of daybreak and nighttime. Roznowski had a lighting tone in mind, but once again said it was a joint effort that produced the end result.

"I didn't want blue lights for nighttime," Roznowski said. "The lighting director came up with this whole idea that the asylum form of nighttime would be a harsh streetlighting."

As for the casting, Roznowski brought over many talents from the "A Few Good Men" production he had been casting for prior to "Cuckoo's Nest."

"I transferred a lot the cast from the 'A Few Good Men' auditions to 'Cuckoo's Nest,'" he said. "It was sort of an interesting, happy accident. Alex kind of emerged as the choice for McMurphy and it sort of fell into place around him."

Roznowski is referring to theatre senior Alex West, who's starred in numerous productions for the MSU Department of Theatre. Even with Nicholson's performance in the film adaptation looming over any actor who portrays McMurphy, West's approach remained the same.

"I've never seen the movie," he said. "I've always known that Jack Nicholson's played that part. I would say we were trying to bring out vulnerable moments for McMurphy instead of making him just a rough character. We tried to make him more of a vulnerable guy. He jokes a lot and is pretty much all about himself, so I tried to hone in on the things I'm typically good at on stage."

Roznowski did what he says no director should do and watched the movie during the summer, and after watching the film, Roznowski's perspective of the production's identity resonated even more clearly.

"I watched it, and that movie is so different than the play, so it was easy to let that comparison go," Roznowski said.

As the show continues to run, West, who brings a flare of energy to McMurphy, has been pleased with his experience while working on "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

"I've had a really great experience," West said. "I've done several productions for MSU and I'd say this was the first time where I felt confident to go to a rehearsal and solidify the academics and apply that to an actual show. I felt that was very comforting — to know that all of my education could be put into a show and shown to an audience."

Tickets for the show are available at a cost of \$10 for MSU students or \$15 for general admission. For more information, or to see the show for

yourself, visit whartoncenter.com or call 1-800-WHARTON.

Originally Published: 10 hours ago

The State News is published by the students of [Michigan State University](http://www.msu.edu). **State News, Inc.** is a private, nonprofit corporation. Its current 990 tax form is available for review upon request at *435 E. Grand River Avenue* during business hours.

All Content © Copyright 2009, The State News | Valid [HTML](#) & [CSS](#)

Proudly powered by [Detroit Softworks](#)