

Cultural Survival

Ease on Down to Kelsey

THE Pennington Players will bring a multicultural production of the Broadway musical *The Wiz* to the stage at Mercer County Community College's Kelsey Theatre March 6 through 15. A public reception, with an opportunity to meet the cast and crew, will be held on opening night.

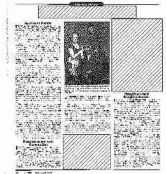
Directed by Kyrus of Hamilton Township, this winner of seven Tony Awards including Best Musical, featuring music and lyrics by Charlie Smalls, is a soulful retelling of classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. The original production ran for four years and more than 1,600 performances. The most popular song from the production is "Ease on Down the Road," sung by the characters as they dance down the Yellow Brick Road.

Although based on Baum's *Wizard of Oz*, in which a little girl named Dorothy is carried away from her home by a Tornado and transported to the Land of Oz, *The Wiz* takes the classic fairy tale in an all-new direction. Its rock score and modern libretto reframe the story in such a way that it seems somehow more relevant. The musical merges Dorothy and her friends with the rhythms and soul of Motown and brings to life the usual *Oz* characters and a few we may not know as well.

The production being mounted by the Pennington Players boasts a multicultural cast. In addition to the principal roles, the "chorus" parts are covered by a group of singers who are part of the pit. With the music director Jay Kawarsky, they are known as "Jay and the Pits." The onstage ensemble parts are covered by a group of dancers who are everything from the tornado and the yellow brick road to poppies and citizens of Oz. The feel of show will be contemporary grunge, but with the heart and soul of the original Oz story.

According to director Kyrus, "The Wiz' presents great opportunities unlike any other production, not only at Kelsey Theatre, but in musical theater in general. The original movie and original Broadway cast featured an entirely African-American cast and crew. I feel that this show is so much more than just black or just white... it is about *everyone*. For me, 'The Wiz' is about all nationalities and all backgrounds and this production will showcase the melting pot that we call America."

The Pennington Players will perform *The Wiz* at Kelsey Theatre on the West Windsor Campus of Mercer County Community College, 1200 Old Trenton Road, March 6-15. Performances: Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m. Ticket cost \$16, \$14 seniors, \$12 students/children; (609) 570-3333; www.kelseyatmccc.org; www.penningtonplayers.org



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