

The whiz behind 'The Wiz'

Local, multi-talented artist Kyrus Westcott dishes on his experience bringing the Broadway musical "The Wiz" to MCCC's Kelsey Theatre.

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Kyrus Westcott doesn't have a specific job title, he has several. Hailing from Hamilton, this actor/comedian/producer/director/writer has fast become one of the east coast's most promising and popular performers. He's been featured in over 35 theatrical productions – including "Oklahoma!," "Bye Bye Birdie" and "Macbeth" – and, this month at MCCC's Kelsey Theatre, he directs an energetic rendition of "The Wiz," a Tony Award-winning Broadway musical based on L. Frank Baum's classic tale, "The Wizard of Oz."

Made even more popular by the 1978 film version starring Diana Ross and Michael Jackson, "The Wiz" is a soulful, urban twist on the story of Dorothy and her fantastic friends, told through the rousing music and lyrics by Charlie Smalls.

In the Kelsey Theatre show (presented by the Pennington Players), the talented ensemble includes Trenton's Sasha Alexandria as Dorothy, Lambertville's Allwyn "Lynn" Baskin as Scarecrow, Hamilton's Nicholas Pecht as Tin Man, Clarksburg's Jamel Taylor as Lion and Hightstown's Antwan Michael as The Wiz. Backing them up are a group of pit singers and a crew of experienced dancers, both of which Westcott is particularly proud.

"In this production, I've added 'Jay and the Pits,' a group of five females who sit with the band and just sing their hearts out," Westcott says. "I felt this was vital

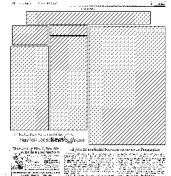
because they provide a very important backbone to the show, supporting the actions taking place on stage. I also added a 'Dance Corps,' a group of professionals

with extremely high quality techniques that you wouldn't normally see in a community theater production. Both are amazing new elements, added to an already amazing ensemble."

Though it's likely his most ambitious, "The Wiz" isn't Westcott's first gig as theatrical director. He previously helmed the Kelsey Theatre's production of "James and the Giant Peach," as well as Town and Country Theatre's "Seussical the Musical." As a stand-up comedian, Westcott has also appeared in comedy clubs across New Jersey and New York, including Stress Factory, Stand Up NY and Gotham Comedy Club. He has his own production company, K2K Entertainment, and through it he's produced nearly a dozen stand-up shows, one-act plays and charity events. All that passion has spilled over into his work on "The Wiz," which he describes as a life-long dream.

"The Wiz' is a show that's very close to my heart," Westcott says. "Ever since I performed in a production of it in my junior year of high school, I knew it was a show that I would love to direct. What makes the show so special is that the entire thing has a such a smooth rhythm. From beginning to end, it's just one rockin' production, and I was happy to be able to put my own spin on that."

"The Wiz" premiered at The Kelsey Theatre on Friday, March 6 and continues through Sunday, March 15. Tickets are \$16 for adults, \$14 for seniors and \$12 for students and children. The Kelsey Theatre is located at MCCC's West Windsor campus at 1200 Old Trenton Road. For more information, including showtimes, visit www.kelseyatmccc.org/wiz. For more on Kyrus Westcott, go to www.kyrusonline.com.





Dorothy (Sasha Alexandria) and her friends, from left: Allwyn "Lynn Baskin," Nicholas Pect and Jamel Taylor.

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