

"Hair" performers shed clothes to educate viewers

By Zoe Schubot | Published 17 hours ago



By Alice Kole / The State News

Theatre and interdisciplinary social science senior Jenise Cook rehearses a song Mar. 17, 2015, at the Auditorium, 542 Auditorium Rd. "Hair" will be performed in the Wharton Center April 17-26. Alice Kole/The State News

On Friday night, students in the [MSU Department of Theatre's](#) production of "Hair" presented the finished product of their four months of preparation to an eager audience.

Perhaps the most shocking— and most moving— moment of the show, which has a myriad of mature and controversial themes, occurred when the cast stripped down completely in an act of protest that closes out the first act. Director Deric McNish took caution when approaching the scene in order to ensure utmost comfort and security for everyone involved.

"I was very cautious because I didn't want anyone to feel coerced or uncomfortable about it so for me it was never essential to my concept for the show," McNish said. "If everyone had decided not to do it that would have been fine, but they all decided that it was important so most of them are doing it."

Every actor was encouraged to make the decision on whether or not they wanted to bare it all, but McNish said that he was pleased by the students' determination and dedication to the show and its message.

"(The nudity) was just an element of protest and it's during that moment where Claude is singing 'Where Do I Go' and they're all asking that same question of where do I go what do I do," McNish said.

"Shedding clothes is part of that answer for them."

From an actor's perspective, the experience of being nude onstage was unlike any other.

Theatre senior Joshua Whitson described the experience as both "liberating" and "terrifying."

"You know that rush when you're on a roller coaster and you're at the top waiting to go down? That is literally the feeling that you get when you start taking off your clothes on stage," Whitson said.

Whitson said that the scene required an immense amount of self-awareness and acceptance of his own body and its power to make a statement.

The nature of the show allowed for the cast to bond in a way that Whitson said he has never experienced in

a show before.

“It just really changed all of us,” Whitson said. “We said things to each other that we’ve never said to anyone else and felt things together and it was cool because a lot of it was based around music because the show is so musical and has such a powerful impact and we got to experience all of that together and it was beautiful.”

“Hair” is playing through next weekend. Tickets are available at the [Wharton Center website](#).