

The Pinball Wizard

Legendary music from The Who highlights *Tommy*

Long before *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Rent*, there was *The Who's Tommy*, the rock opera that started it all. A revolutionary musical based on one of the most innovative albums in history, *Tommy* paved the way for some of Broadway's biggest hits, perhaps even this year's Tony nominee *American Idiot*.

The Arts Center will stage the rock-and-roll show this summer, offering audiences an exhilarating night of theater unlike anything they've experienced on Hilton Head Island.

"We'll be amping it up," said director Russell Garrett, whose previous Arts Center credits include *Chicago*, *Cabaret* and *Ain't Misbehavin'*. "It will be bigger and grander than the conventional staging."

A top pick of Arts Center audiences surveyed spring 2009, *Tommy* features such iconic songs as "Pinball Wizard," "See Me, Feel Me," "I'm Free" and "Tommy, Can You Hear Me?" The original concept album was composed by legendary Who guitarist Pete Townshend in 1969, and was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1998.

"It's a classic," said musical director John Bell, who worked with Garrett on *Cabaret*. "Like any other music that is good, it has lasted through the ages."

The first musical work

explicitly billed as a rock opera, the double album features a complex set of pop-rock arrangements, mixing opera, classical and rock sounds. Four decades after its release, it remains one of the most respected and critically acclaimed albums of the rock era.

In 1975, *Tommy* was turned into a movie, featuring an all-star cast that included The Who lead singer Roger Daltrey, Ann-Margaret, Jack Nicholson, Tina Turner, Eric Clapton, Keith Moon and Elton John as the unforgettable pinball champ dressed in huge, cherry-red platform boots.

"Everything about it was over-the-top outrageous," Garrett said. "The stage show is a very different experience than the movie."

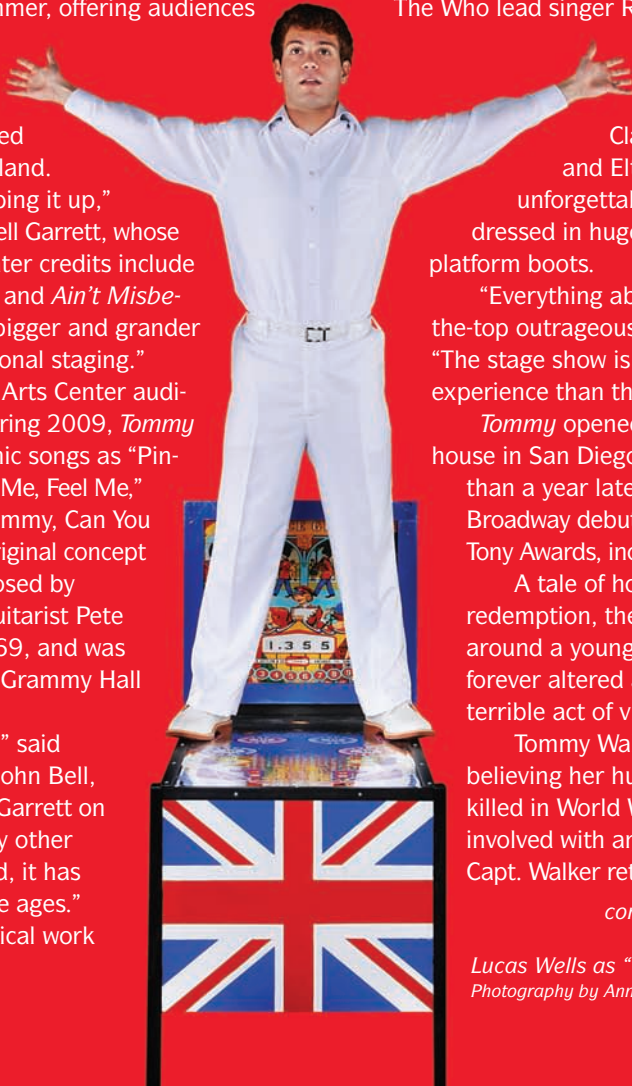
Tommy opened at La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego in 1992. Less than a year later, it made its Broadway debut, winning five Tony Awards, including Best Score.

A tale of hope, healing and redemption, the plot revolves around a young boy whose life is forever altered and defined by a terrible act of violence.

Tommy Walker's mother, believing her husband has been killed in World War II, becomes involved with another man. When Capt. Walker returns home to find

continued on page 12

Lucas Wells as "Tommy"
Photography by Anne



Theater Series *continued from page 10*

the couple embracing, he becomes enraged and accidentally kills the lover. Tommy, who witnesses the murder in the reflection of a mirror, is so traumatized, he loses the ability to hear, speak or see.

However, things change for the troubled boy when he discovers he has an uncanny ability to play pinball. "Deaf, dumb and blind" Tommy soon finds his gaming success rocketing him to cult status, while his parents continue to try a number of treatments to return their child back to normal.

Pictures will be projected behind the set throughout the play, allowing audiences to understand what is going on inside Tommy's head.

Playing the lead role is Lucas Andrew Wells, who just finished a two-year national tour of Broadway's *Spring Awakening*.

"For his whole life, Tommy wanted to be like everyone else," Wells said of his character. "When he finally breaks free from his catatonic state, he is thrust into the world of a celebrity. I can't imagine how overwhelming that would be."

A longtime Who fan, Wells had a chance to see an special exhibit on *Tommy* at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame when he was a senior in high school.

The cast of "The Who's Tommy"
Photography by Anne



"I love, love the music," Wells said. "It's so cool that I get to do this."

Delaney Yurco, who played young Cosette in last year's production of *Les Misérables*, will alternate the role of 4-year-old Tommy with Rachel Valvo. Rachel's brother Jarod Valvo, along with Whitaker Gannon, will play 10-year-old Tommy.

To recreate *Tommy's* classic rock sound, the Arts Center has assembled an orchestra consisting of acoustic and electric guitars, electric bass, drums and three synthesizers.

"We're creating a rock band to perform the music," Bell said. "We're going at it pretty hard."

Cast as Tommy's parents are Laura Hodos and Patrick Oliver Jones, who have worked together on several Florida productions.

"The music is universal and timeless," Hodos said. "It gives me chills every time I listen to it."



Become a fan!

Visit us at facebook.com/artshhi
for regular updates and
exclusive content.