Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: Oh, what a beautiful morning? It's just one of the many iconic songs attributed to the team of Rogers and Hammerstein. In their first collaboration, they created Oklahoma. It's romance, a Western and a piece of legendary Americana that many can quote by heart. I'm Nicki Donnelson, and this is the Missouri State Journal.

Nicki Donnelson: My guest today is Robert Westenberg, coordinator of the musical theater program at Missouri State University. He tells us about an incredible opportunity for the Springfield community to see MSU students performing alongside the Springfield symphony for two night only production of Roger and Hammerstein's, Oklahoma, this November.

Robert W.: This particular project was generated by Kyle Pickett who is the head of the Springfield Symphony Orchestra. He approached me about a collaboration with the Musical Theater Department and thought I it was a cool idea, that we could perhaps put something together on top of our regular season that would augment their season as well and will also give our students another project to work on, more opportunities to perform.

Robert W.: In this particular season, he wanted to concentrate on Americana. We started thinking about Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, what would be the best one. Then we finally settled on Oklahoma. Then when Kyle approached Rodgers and Hammerstein, the organization, he found out that the show had never had an official concert version done, ever. Not a sanctioned RNH concert version.

Nicki Donnelson: The Rogers and Hammerstein Group found that some work had begun on a concert version, but it had never been completed. Westenberg was excited about the prospect of developing this concert version and putting his own spin on this classic. Alongside the Springfield Symphony Orchestra, MSU students and faculty will present the lyrics and narration.

Nicki Donnelson: The Oklahoma Score builds upon dialogue and action from previous scenes. Westenburg found inventive ways to include this action without transforming the production from its initial intent, to highlight the orchestral beauty of Oklahoma. He explains more about what to expect during this concert, November 9th and 10th.

Robert W.: It's not going to be a concert version where they're all dressed in formal attire and they come up to a microphone and they sing it. It's going to be actually staged. The lines are going to be fully memorized. It's going to be fully acted. There's full scenes, even a little bit of dance. It's going to be somewhere in between a more formal concert presentation and a full blown production.

Robert W.: The full symphony will be on the stage and it will be the original orchestrations with a full complement of musicians will be on stage. Then they will be flanked with risers, which the ensemble students and the principal students will be on chairs in front of the orchestra and what is normally the orchestra pit, will be sunken just slightly to [inaudible 00:02:56] an acting area and that's where the main part of the staging will take place.

Nicki Donnelson: What makes Rogers and Hammerstein musicals so special? Westenberg argues that while there are definitely some dated elements in viewpoints, the duo tried to touch on big issues. The result, productions full of hope and ear worms that make you smile.

Robert W.: Well Rogers and Hammerstein, I think to me, as you get older they get better. They resonate more deeply with their themes and I think you can honestly say, and it's an overused term, I know. You can honestly say that they were geniuses and that, that particular collaborative, they were both wildly successful in their respective fields before they got together in a partnership.

Robert W.: They brought out aspects in each other that had not been brought out before with our previous collaborators. It was a perfect synchronicity between the two that created some of the most amazing pieces of musical theater that we have today. And I mean, I strongly know in my bones that in 200 or 300 years, they're still going to be performing Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Robert W.: It is still going to resonate with people because their themes are eternal. They are wildly, they're both realistic and optimistic at the same time. They deal with really hardcore issues and yet, there is a overpowering sense of can do spirit and things will work out and love conquers all. And I mean Hammerstein was a irresistibly hopeless romantic and then that bleeds through all of his work. And Richard Rogers was the perfect man to bring those lyrics to life.

Nicki Donnelson: The production runs November 9th and 10th at Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts. For more information, visit Springfieldmosymphony.org. You can also purchase tickets at missouristateticks.com. That was Robert Westenberg and I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the office of university communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.