

CHECK THIS OUT

Learning from the past: I first saw The Who's rock opera *Tommy* in 1971, when it was only 2 years old. It got a lot of mileage from the counterculture around it—but I thought the show (a university production) was a big, fat, silly mess, bustin' out all over like a little kid and latching on to every single angle it could find to justify its novelty.

But if hindsight is 20/20, then San Diego Repertory Theatre has better than perfect vision. It's mounted *The Who's Tommy*, a 1993 adaptation by The Who's Pete Townshend and former La Jolla Playhouse artistic director Des McAnuff, as its 36th-season opener—and an extraordinarily disciplined cast and technically superior work of art has surfaced where a bunch of ragtag college kids once stood.

B.Slade is absolutely first-rate as Tommy Walker, struck deaf, dumb and blind through a fatal lovers' quarrel he witnesses, only to reinvent himself as a pinball champion and leader of a messianic cult. Tommy will lose his followers as he exhorts them to alter their states of consciousness from within—but "Listening to You," the finale, is an iconic testament to his vindication.

Director Sam Woodhouse, choreographer Javier Velasco and music director Steve Gunderson have mounted the best Rep entry I've seen in the eight years I've covered the group, thanks in no small measure to the tech crew's use of the playing surface and the outstanding performance of Davina van Dusen, who plays Tommy at age 10.

The show, staged in partnership with The San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts, plays through Aug. 14 at The Lyceum Theatre, 79 Horton Plaza, Downtown. \$42-\$57. sdrep.org

—**Martin Jones Westlin**