



Tuesday, September 28, 2004

Oakland University presents 'The Laramie Project'

Oakland University's **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** presents "The Laramie Project," a docudrama for stage focusing on the October 1998 death of Mathew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay college student, who was found brutally beaten in the hills outside Laramie, Wyo., and died six days later.

The play emerged through court testimony, police records and hundreds of interviews conducted by writer and director Moisés Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theater Project. Starkly entitled, "The Laramie Project," Mathew Shepard is never depicted on stage.

Thomas Suda, special instructor of theatre at OU who also is a well-known area actor with credits from the Hilberry, Gem, Attic, Bonstelle and Meadow Brook theatres, directs "The Laramie Project." His most recent project, the lighthearted musical, "Starting Here, Starting Now," is a drastic contrast to his current project.

"The Laramie Project demonstrates how theatre can engage society and how we can learn from events, even such horrific events as Mathew Shepard's brutal murder, and translate such events into art. It is also an object lesson on how art can teach tolerance and build community," Suda said.

Suda directs an ensemble of 12 actors who shift from one real-life character to another as they reveal responses of townsfolk, police officers, media, religious leaders and even the original actors who conducted the Laramie interviews.

The subject hit close to home for one of the cast members. "Since I am a young gay man, this play to me is sort of a justification for why so many people are afraid to be who they truly are," said Benjamin Lynch of Midland, a musical theatre student. "This play is about tolerance – sexually, racially, religiously – anything that might set us apart."

Other cast members include Robert Arbaugh of New Baltimore, Dan Banas of Macomb, Jeff Hannah of Troy, Blair Mellow of Huntington Woods, Megan Mullinger of Grosse Pointe, Katie Pierce of Royal Oak, Andrea Scobie of Royal Oak, Lauren Terpening of White Lake, Amy Thompson of Howell, Joel Trumble of Lake Orion and Jacquelyn Whitesel of Lake Orion.

Performances will be held in Varner Studio Theatre on Oct. 7-9 and 14-16 at 8 p.m., with matinees scheduled for Oct. 10 and 17 at 2 p.m. Tickets can be purchased through the Varner Box Office from noon to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Friday or one hour prior to each performance. To reserve tickets call (248) 370-3013 or e-mail mtd@oakland.edu. Tickets also are available through **Ticketmaster**.

A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Triangle Foundation in Detroit.

The organization S.A.F.E. On Campus is presenting Coming Out Week 2004, which coincides with "The Laramie Project." A variety of activities are planned throughout the week including workshops, a potluck, rally, candlelight vigil and more. Keynote speaker Jeff Montgomery of the Triangle Foundation also will be in the Oakland Center Fireside Lounge on Friday, Oct. 8, from noon to 1 p.m.

For more information on S.A.F.E. On Campus or Coming Out Week, contact Sara Crampton, coordinator of student leadership development, at (248) 370-2024 or crampton@oakland.edu.

For more information on the Department of Music Theatre and Dance including other upcoming performances, visit the **Department of Music, Theatre and Dance** Web site or contact the department at (248) 370-2030 or mtd@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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death of Mathew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay college student, who was found brutally beaten in the hills outside Laramie, Wyo., and died six days later. The play emerged through court testimony, police records and hundreds of interviews conducted by writer and director Moisés Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theater Project. Starkly entitled, "The Laramie Project," Mathew Shepard is never depicted on stage.

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