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For Immediate Release

GSU Theatre and Performance Studies Program presents *The Laramie Project*: a docudrama that, sadly, still resonates with audiences

October, 10, 2019 (University Park, IL): On October 6, 1998, a 21-year-old University of Wyoming student was kidnapped, brutally beaten, and left tied to a fence in the middle of the prairie just outside Laramie, Wyoming. He would not be discovered until the next day. The only spots on his body not covered by blood were tracks on his cheeks from tears. His name was Matthew Shepard and he was attacked because he was gay.

The Laramie Project is a docudrama that covers the aftermath of the hate crime against Matthew Shepard, his subsequent death, and the trial and sentencing of the perpetrators. Created by Moises Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theater Project from hours of interviews with residents of Laramie, the project explores how this brutal crime sparked a national movement that shed much needed attention on the treatment, tolerance, and acceptance of LGBTQ+ citizens.

Director Jane F. Cox of Tinley Park, believes the timing is particularly apt for this production. "Twenty-one years after Matthew Shepard's death, we can see and reflect on how far we've come and how far we have yet to go. We are witnessing a political climate in which hate speech is permissible in some circles. As we speak, the Supreme Court of the United States is deciding whether or not the Civil Rights Act protects LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination in the workplace due to sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We live in a country where an individual can marry their partner of the same sex on Sunday and get fired for that marriage on Monday."

"At the time of Matthew Shepard's murder, the town of Laramie, received an unfair amount of negative press. The town's residents were accused of intolerance and hatred. I think it's important to realize that what happened in Laramie can and does happen anywhere and everywhere."

The Laramie Project includes 60 characters. The original production featured 8 actors playing the 60 roles. In GSU's production, 17 actors portray the 60 roles. "It's a challenging piece in terms of the demands placed on the performers," Cox says. "I am fortunate to have a thoughtful, resourceful, and committed cast. One of our actors goes from playing the father of a perpetrator in Act II to playing Matthew Shepard's father in Act III.

Actor Kevin Kohn says, "I'm on a rollercoaster with my roles. In order of appearance, I play Jonas Slonaker, Doug Laws, Rulon Stacey, Governor Geringer, Fred Phelps and Aaron McKinney. These are men all over the spectrum and that's a challenge that excites me. When I'm not in the rehearsal space working on scenes, I'm at home going line by line figuring out what I can draw from to make these characters real. It's a balancing act. We're playing characters but all of these characters are real people."

Cox adds, "The actors are tasked with portraying Laramie residents with respect and dignity—even those with whom we disagree or with whom we may have trouble connecting or empathizing."

Cast

Sam Brassfield, Matteson, IL
Rquis Bryant, Chicago, IL
Lardell Clark, Hazel Crest, IL
Lynne Clayton, Park Forest, IL
Nekia Driver, Chicago, IL
Michael Fisher, Tinley Park, IL
Andrea Fleming, Steger, IL
Brandon Jordan, Bourbonnais, IL
Kevin Kohn, Clifton, IL
Sade' May, Flossmoor, IL
Genesis Michaela, Frankfort, IL
Melanie Morris, Wilmington, IL
Gerardo Reyes, Summit, IL
Manuel Reza, South Chicago Heights, IL
Bob Szczepanski, Orland Park, IL
DeMario Tribett, Chicago, IL
Aaron West, Glenwood, IL

When

Friday, November 1 at 8 p.m.
Saturday, November 2 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, November 3 at 2 p.m.

Where

Governors State University
Center for Performing Arts
1 University Pkwy
University Park, IL 60484

When You Go

Tickets are \$15 and \$10 for students with valid I.D. at the box office. For tickets, information, and the complete cast list, please visit **CenterTickets.net** or call **(708) 235-2222**.

The box office is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m., and two hours prior to performances (the box office is open until 6 p.m. on Thursdays).

About Theatre and Performance Studies at GSU

This play is produced by GSU's Theatre and Performance Studies (T.A.P.S.) Program. GSU's T.A.P.S. bachelor's degree is the only degree combining the two disciplines at a public state university in Illinois. For information on the T.A.P.S. program, contact Dr. Patrick Santoro at psantoro@govst.edu. Like us on Facebook @tapsgsu for updates.

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state university, GSU is committed to providing high-quality, accessible, and responsible higher education opportunities. GSU is located 35 miles south of Chicago in University Park, IL, and is committed to embracing diversity and academic excellence while transforming student passion into lifelong purpose.