



**Tony
C.
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Town says play not true Laramie

EDITOR'S NOTE—Tony Yang was the *Monitor's* editor in chief last fall. Now he's editor of the the student newspaper in Laramie, Wyoming. He has a unique perspective on the play and the town.

With Ohlone about to unveil its version of the *Laramie Project*, I was asked to provide some insight. As a recent transfer student at the University of Wyoming, I can only attest to what is, rather than what was.

Laramie is a town of 27,200, a third of which are students at the university. It's known for its spectacular view of the Snowy Mountains, a bowl-winning football team and the death of Matthew Shepard in 1998.

Since then, the school and the town have tried mightily to erase the impression of homophobia and prejudice. They have set up an annual Shepard Symposium for Social Justice in the spring, where people come to listen to a diverse set of lecturers and seminars for a week. Locals reject the national view that Laramie is a hotbed of anti-gay sentiment.

When Ohlone puts on its version of the *Laramie Project*, audience members must be careful to separate fact from creative storytelling. Truth is always subjective.

Wyoming's motto is the "Equality State." The population of the entire state is less than half a million. Virtually all cowgirls and cowboys abide by the state's hardy attitude of "live and let live." The Laramie Chamber of Commerce said: "From the immigrants who worked on the railroad years ago, to the first women to vote and act as jury, to the international students that culturally enrich our community today, Laramie remains a place of diversity and tolerance." A statue in a town park pays tribute to the first woman in America to vote in a public election (in 1870). It was a Laramie judge who established the world's first co-ed jury.

Shepard's murder was an aberration in crime, as well. Since Shepard's murder in 1998, there have been fewer than four murders in Laramie. What happened seven years ago may have sparked national consciousness and outrage, but what's done is done, goes the prevailing thought. Even still, there are efforts to inform and enlighten.

Two Fridays ago, there was a presentation by a pair of gay college administrators, called "When the Gays move into Mr. Roger's neighborhood," designed to dispel myths and educate people about their community. The next day, the first-ever "Homegrown Drag Show" took place at the Cowboy Bar in downtown Laramie. Obviously, even Laramie must change with the times.



Photos by Daniel Kwan

Laramie Project opens this week

By **JESSICA LOSSE**
Staff writer

The *Laramie Project*, a play written by Moisés Kaufman, is about a group from the Tectonic Theater who ventured to the rural town following the death of Matthew Shepard, a gay student from the University of Wyoming.

Shepherd was tied to a fence, beaten and left for dead in 1998.

With strong images and words, the play presented the views of the townspeople of Laramie. "We are not like this," said one citizen.

The actors and actresses were constantly changing their costumes

and characters, making it a bit hard to follow each person's opinion about Matthew Shepherd, his attackers and the subsequent trial. Yet each character was portrayed beautifully, leaving viewers to wonder how the actors were able to keep it all straight.

Very little scene changes took place during the play. The simple prairie setting was pretty but when the fence becomes part of the background, the image and the statements made by characters were hard to take in.

This was a very dramatic play, filled with controversy and emotion; it was hard not to cry at the

most intense moments.

For these actors to be able to make the audience feel the true emotion behind the whole story was amazing, and one could feel the issues burrowing under your skin. Many should come away with a better understanding of how people react to such violence when it is close to home.

Some people say that violence in the media has numbed people's reactions to it, making it a part of daily life.

After seeing this play, one can hardly say that statement is true.

Such brutality against any living person is scary, uncalled for, and

disgusting, not something for others to pass off as nothing.

Warning: this play has strong opinions about the gay lifestyle, murder, and what is right and wrong. I would urge everyone hoping to attend to walk in the theater with an open mind, and subsequently, open eyes.

The play, performed by the Ohlone theater department will open this week at the Smith Center. It will be playing Nov. 4, 5, 10, 11, and 12 at 8 p.m.

There will be a private performance Thursday, Nov. 3 free of charge with a reception at 6 p.m. and the performance will begin at 8. Students and staff are welcome.



For tickets or more information contact the Smith Center Box Office at 510-659-6031 or visit www.smithcenterpresents.com

Tickets:

\$12 Adults

\$10 Seniors/Staff/Students

\$8 Youth Under 12

Top photo: from left, Kamran Alexander, Erica Andracchio, Charles Olson, Marianne Ford Serrao and Salem Barner. At left is Charles Olson. Below is Christine Hearn and Stephanie Hammack, reacting to news of Matthew Shepherd's death.

