



# The Sun Star

University of Alaska Fairbanks

## The Laramie Project

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by Ashley Anklowitz

In 1998, Matthew Shepard, a University of Wyoming student, was found, brutally beaten, and tied to a split-rail fence in the town of Laramie, Wyo. He died six days later.

Shepard was beaten so severely because he was gay.

“The Laramie Project” is a play that was created from over 200 interviews done with the people of Laramie, Wyo. over a year and half.

The Laramie Project is powerful and heart wrenching. The story is very difficult to swallow. The idea of what people can do to each other without remorse is a horrendous thing to accept.

The play is a difficult one to perform, with each actor playing around ten different roles. The actors switch characters right before the audience’s eyes by adding or removing articles of clothing. Everything is done raw and in your face, with no secrets about the inner workings of the play.

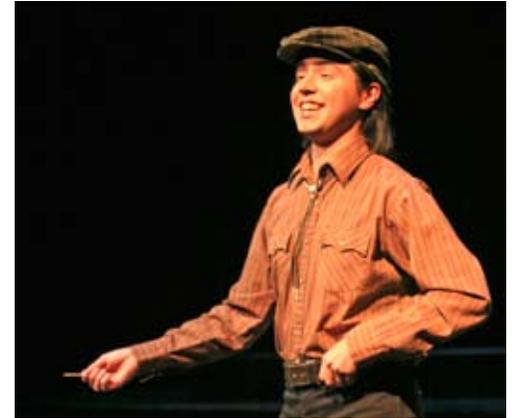
Another impressive aspect of this play was that if an actor was part of an act with only one of their characters, they had to stay in the same place and hold their last position until they were in the scene again or music played overhead to signify a change of acts.

About the only bad thing about this play is that is very long, lasting two and a half to three hours. It also can be confusing at first to keep track of all the characters. With eight actors playing around ten characters apiece, it is very hard to adjust your perspective and accept the actors switching roles. Even so, it makes a wonderful challenge for the actors. Actors that can change everything about themselves to portray so many different people at the drop of a hat show that the university has great talent in its theatre department.

This play is a fantastic challenge for actors, and with my background in acting, I like to challenge the actors when I come here to direct plays,” said director Carrie Baker. “My large hope is that eventually we can live in a world where these things don’t happen. I know theater can change minds, and hopefully if this play is performed enough, things will change.”

As the actors went through the play, it seemed that a lot of them, if not all, were really affected by this play, and they used these raw emotions to enhance their performance. Some did trip over each other, but recovered well as if it did not happen. The smooth changes from one scene to another were brilliant. However, in the second half of the play, the use of technology was beyond words. They used pre-taped news reels that they made. It was a very different experience to go from watching the actors to being drawn into the projector images on the back wall.

This really is a must-see play. It is a great drama that will pull at your heart strings and make you feel for the family who lost their child. The play runs through Nov. 23 in the Salisbury Theatre.



Above: Ramiro Rivera as “Doc”, in one of his many roles. Below: Hadassah Nelson and Jonathan Roberts are a shop owner and interviewer there to ask the locals questions about Shepard’s death.



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Above: Junior Andrew Cassel plays the Sheriff of Laramie Wyo. in The Laramie Project.

Right: Anna Gagne-Hawes and Hadassah Nelson interacting as two social workers in the town of Laramie.



Photos by Maureen McCombs