

# Play based on hate and crime gets set to premier

by Cassidy Scott

Director James Eikrem, in his eighth production at Clackamas Community College, is bringing the story of Matthew Shepard to the Osterman theater stage in the winter term production, "The Laramie Project."

The Laramie Project, based on the 1998 murder of homosexual college student Matthew Shepard, brings a darker and more mature theme to the CCC theater department.

"This one has a much more serious tone. Most of the plays up to this point have been either more on the comic side or more dramas that have more comedic humor elements to them," Eikrem said. "So the Laramie Project is definitely a much more serious play."

And with the play being cast in early January, the combination of the time crunch and the nature of the story has provided its own challenges for the cast and crew.

"I have 11 actors, and there are probably about 70 characters all together. Some of them come back, some of them are only on stage just one time, but each actor has a lot to do," Eikrem explained. "It's challenging, but it's a very good challenge, and they're doing a very good job of it."

Stage manager Ani Franz shared Eikrem's testament.

"Everyone's playing a lot of parts, there's a lot going on, we're in a lot of places," Franz said. "I think one of the most challenging things is trying to keep track of where everyone is and who they are, and where their props are, and where they're supposed to be entering and exiting."

Rico Starr, CCC student, who has spent time on both the sets of Portland-filmed shows Grimm and Leverage, agreed with Eikrem and Franz.

"It's a lot of work; it's a ton of work. There's a lot of lines, and everybody is playing multiple characters

## Dates of performances:

**Thursdays through Saturdays beginning**

**Feb. 26 through Mar. 8**

**-\$10 for adults**

**-\$8 for Seniors**

**-\$5 online or "pay what you can at the box office" for students.**

**-Talk back panels directly following the March 6 and 7 performances**

... I play a Baptist minister, I play a nightclub DJ, I play a gay playwright," Starr said with a laugh. "That's just three of them - they're so different from each other even though they're all from the same place. So it's a stretch, but it really makes you work."

Despite these challenges, the cast and crew are ready to put on a great production.

Even with the time crunch, Eikrem and Franz are feeling prepared and ready to go come opening night.

For the cast and crew who have been thinking about the Laramie Project and the story of Shepard for months, there is excitement in the thought of bringing the story to light and sharing the power behind its messaging.

"It's a very powerful story, and it really shows the inhumane side of society, but it also shows the very humane side of society in different aspects," Starr said.

What makes this play special to Franz is how "soft" the play is, and how the different aspects of human nature were exemplified in such a small town like Laramie.

"I really enjoy all the different pieces and the aspects and the different stories that come from this one town that's so small you know," Franz explained.

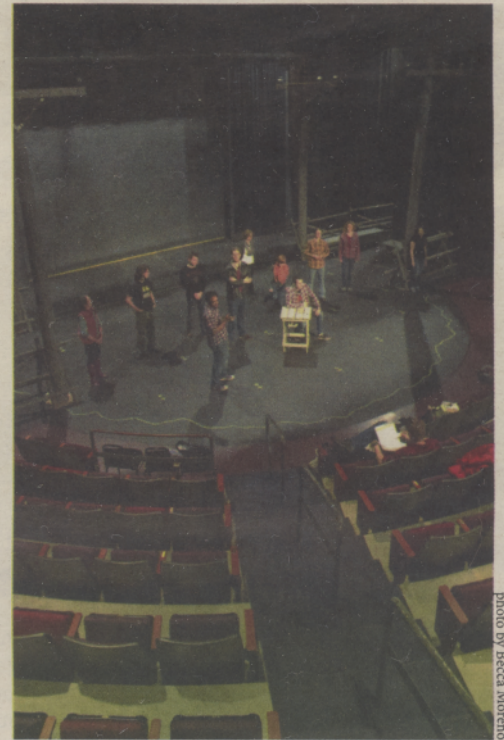
Many people consider this play to be controversial, but so far the CCC department has been met with much support from both CCC students and the Oregon City community. Other cities in the U.S. where this play has been shown have not been as lucky.

"We're working closely with the Matthew Shepard Foundation, and they have said that in some areas they get people standing up and booing, calling names," Jennifer Jett, Outreach Coordinator, said. "Do I think we're going to get that out of here? Probably not...we've been met with a lot of support from the community and we have a lot of organizations coming in who and want to be a part of it."

One of the reasons the play may be considered controversial is in the way that the play is set up, with compilation of hundreds of real interviews.

"Most of the dialogue in it is taken directly from transcripts of actually people that had something to do either with Matthew or the case itself," Starr said. He went on to explain. "This is what these people said, it's not like a writer sat down and wrote 'I'm going to do this and this and this,' no, this is what these people said, and this is what we're going to tell you what these people said. Because this is real."

The realness of it, according to Franz, is what



Students rehearse together for their first performance on Feb. 26.

Photo by Becca Moreno

makes it beautiful.

"It really touches on that kind of hope, that rebuilding, the hope that comes from a tragedy like this one," Franz said.

Eikrem agreed: "The hope comes out of keeping his memory alive, and what happened to him alive and putting that forward in such a way that people don't want to see it happen again."

One of the main goals of the play is to make sure that what happened to Shepard never happens again, as well as bringing awareness to hate crimes in general.

"I thought it was an important play to raise awareness around hate crimes. That is another reason why we selected it," Eikrem said. "These hate crimes have not gone away, you hear about things all the time in the news. Hate crimes in general are something we need to keep in the imagination of the public, so that they can deal with them so they can think about how they think about them and then hopefully prevent them in the future."

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