

## **The Laramie Project**

**By Lyla Miklos**

**SHCI Newsletter**

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I am the theatre critic for C101.5 FM and The Satellite and yet, I discovered it was nearly impossible for me to write an objective review for The Laramie Project.

The Laramie Project was developed in response to the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, in Laramie, Wyoming. Writer Moises Kaufman and members of The Tectonic Theatre Project traveled to Laramie four weeks after Shepard – an openly gay college student – was kidnapped, brutally beaten and left to die. Over the course of a year and a half, the company conducted more than 200 interviews. From this testimony the company collaborated to develop the play. A cast of eight actors portrays town residents and members of the original company. All of them struggle to come to terms with the shocking event and the questions raised in the wake of the violence, on subjects including hate crime legislation, human rights and privileges, and the distinction between tolerance and acceptance.

The content of this play is raw. After the recent violent attack against a gay man right here in Hamilton, the play was cutting very close to the bone. Having been personally involved in much of the political action, healing and education in the community as a result of the hate-motivated crime, I found the parallels in how the citizens of Laramie reacted downright eerie. Entire conversations in the play could have just as easily been recorded from the streets, churches, workplaces, homes, businesses and meeting rooms of Hamilton.

A production of The Laramie Project was playing down the road in Toronto at the Buddies and Bad Times Theatre in the heart of Toronto's queer community at Church and Wellesley. The relevance of the material within The Laramie Project was obvious to the administration of Theatre Aquarius, they invited the Studio 180/Buddies In Bad Times production to come and perform in Hamilton for one night only – April 3rd. Aquarius' production was held as a benefit for the Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative (SHCI). Over 400 community members attended. Performers in the production and audience members have all admitted that the powerful material contained in the play is emotionally draining and devastating. Yet, the play in turn has ignited an overwhelming amount of thoughtful discussion and heartfelt introspection.

Theatre Aquarius, a member organization of SHCI, has used the presentation of The Laramie Project to educate our community and to provoke dialogue and thoughtful solutions to eradicating hatred in any form throughout our great city. Our thanks and appreciation goes out to Theatre Aquarius for helping to turn a community tragedy into an opportunity for all of us to rise to new levels of respect and understanding.

**Lyla Miklos**

**Interim Chair - Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Committee for the City of Hamilton & Community Roundtable Member – Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative**

*(With additional information provided by Kathy King – Project Manager, SHCI)*

*Upcoming Local Showing of The Laramie Project: Director Willard Boudreau will bring The Laramie Project to Hamilton again via his theatrical production company Piccadilly Circus. Piccadilly Circus and Hamilton Pride Festival Inc. will present this production during Hamilton Pride Week (June 14-20, 2004). A portion of the proceeds from the June 18th & 19th showings will go towards Hamilton Pride Festival Inc. The Piccadilly Circus production will be performed at The Players' Guild Studio Theatre from June 11th to 20th with a cast of local actors. Check out Hamilton Pride's website ([www.hamiltonpride.com](http://www.hamiltonpride.com)) for more information.*