Deep Discussions: The Laramie Project

By Noelle Selb
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This past weekend's performances of The Laramie Project showed that sometimes the most memorable, poignant works in the arts are true stories. This production, only comprised of excerpts from more than 200 interviews conducted in Laramie, Wyoming by the Tectonic Theater Project, tells the story of Matthew Shepard. Shepard, a college student, was brutally murdered due to his homosexuality. The interviews relate several different aspects of the hate crime that opened the eyes of a few, small western town and an entire nation.

There were many reasons why EMU decided to perform a staged reading of this program, explains director Paul Hildebrand, assistant professor of Theater. "There was a lot of what I would perceive as a very negative, polarizing, hardened viewpoint about a year to a year and a half ago about homosexuality," said Hildebrand concerning EMU and the greater Mennonite Church. "One reason I liked this play is that it really doesn't get into the issue about whether homosexuality is right or wrong. What it looks at is the community and the issue of Laramie in the arts are true stories. The focus was aided with on-campus promotion. Diversity Initiatives Council, Hildebrand said concerning EMU. "When you have an issue that tends to divide people, it's easy for positions to harden... so we need to look at the issue," said Hildebrand. "I thought it presented us with the way to use theater to explore and create a dialogue opportunity that might move our campus forward a little bit and reframe it... and look at it from another perspective." The response he received from the faculty, staff, and students was very encouraging. In an attempt to gather participants, the casting went better than expected. "In some ways, it feels like EMU decided to perform a staged reading of this program, explains director Paul Hildebrand, assistant professor of Theater. "There was a lot of what I would perceive as a very negative, polarizing, hardened viewpoint about a year to a year and a half ago about homosexuality," said Hildebrand concerning EMU and the greater Mennonite Church. "One reason I liked this play is that it really doesn't get into the issue about whether homosexuality is right or wrong. What it looks at is the community and the issue of Laramie in the arts are true stories. The focus was aided with on-campus promotion. Diversity Initiatives Council, Hildebrand said concerning EMU. "When you have an issue that tends to divide people, it's easy for positions to harden... so we need to look at the issue," said Hildebrand. "I thought it presented us with the way to use theater to explore and create a dialogue opportunity that might move our campus forward a little bit and reframe it... and look at it from another perspective." The response he received from the faculty, staff, and students was very encouraging. In an attempt to gather participants, the casting went better than expected. "In some ways, it feels like...

One member of the Tectonic Theater Project, during an interview with The Weather Vane on Monday, March 3, said that if he had known he would have a God thing because "It was an attempt to gather participants, the casting went better than expected. "In some ways, it feels like..." the play was written to be performed by eight actors playing all the different characters, but because I was viewing this as more of a human rights campaign even then a theatrical event, and because of the special context we were doing it in, I decided that I wanted to see if I could invite people from a real cross section of the campus and have one person for every different role," said Hildebrand. The casting went better than imagined. "I took everybody who wanted to be a part. I really thought it was a God thing because we had 45 roles and 45 people, and it seemed like the right person for each part. Everybody just fit." The cast bonded so well, said Hildebrand, that they were hesitant to depart after Sunday's performance. While scripts were allowed onto the campus, the cast and crew rehearsed four times before the actual performance, running lines and blocking scenes. However, the production has been in the works for an entire year. "The projections [seen in the show] were done by a group of Jerry Holsopple's communication students, and they started working last fall... because all this happened in another more honest manner. I like how with The Laramie Project, the artistic form of the theater serves to humanize homosexual and those who hate, and also allows each viewer to translate what they see to their own reality."

"I was really glad to contribute to the discussion through drama or the arts," said Nafziger. "I think the arts often transcend words... I feel as a Christian I need to create a safe space in this office where people can be in this rhetoric. I just, I can't justify Jesus didn't die and put me in this decision. So, my responsibility is to create a safe place for people... To be a part of the play is another good way of creating a safe place for people in the arts often transcend words... I feel as a Christian I need to create a safe space in this office where people can be in this rhetoric. I just, I can't justify Jesus didn't die and put me in this decision. So, my responsibility is to create a safe place for people... To be a part of the play is another good way of creating a safe place for people in the arts often transcend words... I feel as a Christian I need to create a safe space in this office where people can be in this rhetoric. I just, I can't justify Jesus didn't die and put me in this decision. So, my responsibility is to create a safe place for people... To be a part of the play is another good way of creating a safe place for people..."