

S.C.'s Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities presents 'Laramie Project'

Director Dan Day talks about impact on students

GREENVILLE — Set for Nov. 16-19 at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, "The Laramie Project" is based on more than 200 interviews

Kaufman and New York's Tectonic Theatre conducted in Laramie, after the murder of Matthew Shepard. It follows and — in some cases — re-enacts the chronology of Shepherd's visit to a local bar, his kidnap and beating, the discovery of him tied to a fence, the vigil at the hospital, his death and funeral

those people when I'm doing them. I like Edith because it's fun to be a kid and fidget around and do things like kids do.

QN. Can you tell me the name of an actor or actress that you've worked with that has really left you awestruck with their capabilities?

LT. Meryl Streep is just fantastic. Even in that part in "Prarie Home Companion." I saw her three times in "Prada." Bette Midler is incredible. Steve Martin is a really gifted comic performer. Tom Waites, he is so unto himself and Lauren Bacall is amazing! She's 82. She was so young when she started



Lily Tomlin as Edith Anne.

so she has just about known everybody in Hollywood history.

QN. I know you're out. You know you're out. Why do you think so many people just don't seem to get it?

LT. They either put it together or refuse to put it together. I don't know what people think. Maybe I'm inarticulate or something. I remember one time I was on a talk show with Danny Thomas and he was saying everybody should go to Vietnam with Bob Hope. I said I would prefer to go with Jane Fonda. So Danny Thomas was all up in my face screaming at me and my aunt had seen it on television and said "oh that was so cute." Cute? I was trying to make a political statement and Danny Thomas was screaming at me. I just don't think because of the characters I've played people put me together with politics. ▀

and the trial of his killers. It mixes news reports with actors portraying friends, family, cops, killers and other Laramie residents in their own words.

For Dan Day, the acting and directing instructor of this residential public high school that serves 225 students, mostly aged 16-18, the undertaking of "The Laramie Project" is an extremely important venture.

"It's important for a number of reasons," Day explains. "It raises important questions about sexuality, politics, class violence and how we look at privileges versus rights. It raises important questions I want the students to think about. It's very fun and exciting to work on. As a training vehicle it's excellent for our kids."

Day spent 18 years in Dallas, Texas, as artistic director of Kitchen Dog Theatre in Houston. He moved to Greenville two years ago. Prior to directing "Laramie" he directed Arthur Miller's "A View From the Bridge" and Beth Henley's "Crimes of the Heart."

According to Day the cast is comprised of an 11-member ensemble that plays more than 70 characters.

"It's such an ensemble effort and they're always busy transforming into characters," says Day. "The group as a whole is outstanding."

He points to a scene near play's end and the reconstructed sight of the fence Matthew Shepard was found tied to as par-



A scene from 'The Laramie Project.'

ticularly moving.

"Matthew Shepard's dad has a speech near the end — it's a combination of a press release and a statement he made to one of the killers. We've also built a buck fence like the one Matthew was discovered on. Seeing the spot where he was murdered and the delivery of that statement impacts you every time."

Day and his students are excited about the upcoming production, but Day admits he has some concern about reactions from conservative state politicians who might object to the state funded school's staging of the controversial play.

"We're a little concerned — but we haven't had any negative response yet. We have a pretty courageous dean here. This is an arts school and just by the nature of the place people are more accepting of diversity, individuality and freedom of self-expression." ▀

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