

Dennis and Judy Shepard to attend 20th anniversary production of The Laramie Project

Twenty years ago this past fall, on the evening of Oct 6, 1998, openly gay university student Matthew Shepard was kidnapped, viciously beaten and left to die, tied to a fence on the starry outskirts of Laramie, Wyoming.

In the aftermath of what became known as one of the most infamous hate crimes in modern American history, the close-knit citizens of Laramie were left to confront and investigate the brutality of the crime, its roots in hate and intolerance, and the possibility of the community's own culpability under intense and unsparing national and international media scrutiny.

Over the course of 18 months following Matthew Shepard's murder, members of the Tectonic Theatre Project would travel to Laramie and conduct more than 200 interviews with its residents in an attempt to construct a complex and deeply moving theatrical account of a community's attempt to make sense of the unthinkable and reconcile the unimaginable.

The result was The Laramie Project, a landmark theatrical work hailed by The New York Times as one of the "25 Best Plays Since 'Angels in America.'" In it, an ensemble of actors brings to life over 60 different residents of Laramie who, in words painstakingly culled from interviews, transcripts and journal entries, recount their heart-breaking journey.

Always topical, The Laramie Project's call, not just to tolerance, but to acceptance, seems more compelling than ever in a world beset by cruelty, indifference, obstinate prejudice. As audience members travel with the actors over the course of the production, it becomes clear that the community they begin to recognize is their own, and in that recognition comes the realization that the time for positive change is the urgent responsibility of all.

The Country Day School and its senior acting ensemble have the unparalleled honour of hosting Matthew's parents, Dennis and Judy, during the run of the production. It also has the great pleasure of inviting the surrounding community to share in a once in a lifetime experience by attending a performance and post-production talk back during which Dennis and Judy will reflect on Matthew, the meaning of his death and life and the more accepting world we all hope to build.

The special closing gala performance in Dennis, Judy and Matthew's honour will take place on Saturday, March 2 at 1:30 p.m., with all proceeds going to the Matthew Shepard Foundation in support of its mission to "Erase Hate."

Please come and join us to engage, reflect and be inspired in the company of Dennis and Judy, and in the spirit of their son, Matt, whose short life, though lost, has helped others find their voice.

Performances are Thursday, Feb. 28 and Friday, March 1 at 7 p.m. with a special gala performance raising funds for the Matthew Shepard Foundation and talk back with Dennis and Judy Shepard on Saturday, March 2 at 1:30 p.m. at the Country Day School's Performing Arts Centre Theatre, 13415 Dufferin Street, King. Tickets are \$15 and available at www.cds.on.ca/events.