

Night Writes

Sydney theatre reviews

DECEMBER 2, 2018 DECEMBER 2, 2018 *by* NIGHTWRITESSYDNEY

The Laramie Project | Theatre Travels

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- [2018, ANDREW HOFMAN, CARLY FISHER, DAVE ANGELICO, JOHN MICHAEL BURDON, MATTHEW PRITCHARD, REVIEW, ROSIE NIVEN, SEYMOUR CENTRE, SYDNEY, THE TECTONIC THEATRE PROJECT, THEATRE, THEATRE TRAVELS](#)
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IMAGE BY DAVID HOOLEY

This year marks 20 years since Matthew Shepard was murdered in Laramie, Wyoming which began a media storm about the way our society views gay people and constructs narratives of gay panic and justified violence. When the Tectonic Theatre Project travelled to the small American town to interview residents, they weren't sure what would come out of it and they probably wouldn't have predicted the show continuing to be performed two decades later on the other side of the world.

The Laramie Project is Theatre Travels's debut production as a company interested in both traveling the world and making theatre. This production run also coincides with some significant dates including World AIDS Day and the anniversary of the Yes vote in Australia. Directors Carly Fisher and Rosie Niven talked about the personal and social importance of such a production in an [interview \(https://nightwrites.com/2018/11/11/interview-with-the-directors-of-the-laramie-project-theatre-travels/\)](https://nightwrites.com/2018/11/11/interview-with-the-directors-of-the-laramie-project-theatre-travels/) with Night Writes in November.

Matthew Shepard's murder and the subsequent trials of his murders was a key moment in LGBTQI+ history and the immortalisation of it in *the Laramie Project* allows a reflection on what has changed in the last twenty years and what has stayed the same.

As a piece of verbatim theatre, the script takes the audience right into Laramie, Wyoming with family, friends, university peers, witnesses, and other members of the small community to unravel what happened to Matthew on that night in 1998 but also how this could have happened. Everyone has an opinion about the gay community and they are thrown into stark relief when confronted with a viscous, violent crime.

The nine cast members juggle the town and the Tectonic Theatre Project team between them, finding particularities in each character and drawing that out in their monologues. John Michael Burdon and Matthew Pritchard, in particular, added unique weight and physicality to their characters, carving their words into actual people who were standing on stage and telling their story. The cast's transition between interviews and characters was smooth and well rehearsed; costume changes and set re-arrangement was not distracting or clumsy, which can be the case when so much happens under full lights. It demonstrated a professionalism and attention to detail from the new theatre company that is commendable.

What is so difficult about verbatim theatre is the demand for a sense of spontaneity which prevents the monologues from becoming overly rehearsed and speech-like in quality. While the cast didn't necessarily maintain the conversational tone for all characters, the ones who were in a position to deliver a speech or announcement were powerfully produced. Andrew Hofman as the head of the hospital, in charge of press releases of Matthew's medical status, balanced the character's professional and personal connection well. While Burdon's statement as Dennis Shepard at the sentencing of one of Mathew's murders, was like a punch to the gut, truly devastating to comprehend.

The subtly in the set was well done. A huge lumber wall soars above the back of the stage; it is grand but of humble material, in much the same way that the town of Laramie became a lot bigger in concept than construction when the focus of global media attention. Designed by Dave Angelico, wooden crates, wooden chairs, and two wood sheds that frame the stage create a rustic, masculine, but practical space for this western story.

The Laramie Project follows a horrible story, made no less horrible from knowing the outcome. But it also catches a critical moment in Laramie history, Wyoming history, and US history where a town was forced to look at itself and call into question the attitudes of complacency and wilful ignorance they had allowed to flourish. In Sydney in 2018, this is still a practise of examination worth reminding ourselves of.

The Laramie Project is running at the Reginald Theatre in the Seymour Centre from November 29th – December 7th

One Comment

[The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later | Theatre Travels | Night Writes](#)

DECEMBER 8, 2018 AT 8:23 AM

[...] the same cast and set as the Laramie Project, with the addition of an Obama campaign poster, the changes of ten years are subtle. Now the [...]

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