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Play Review

Fine performances cannot overcome flawed script

The Laramie Project

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Robert L. Johnson Auditorium

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Despite notable efforts on part of the cast and crew, last weekend's production of *The Laramie Project* was not able to rise above its lackluster script and dismal storyline.

Project tells the story of the aftermath of Matthew Shepard's murder in his hometown of Laramie, Wyoming. It follows his killers through the judicial process and shows the effect his death had on his friends and the community in general, mainly through a series of interviews.

Despite excellent acting and a set that was quite original and featured many creative elements (television screens and a giant backdrop screen that changed images from

time to time, to name a few), the script undermined the production.

The first act, which consisted primarily of interviews with various cast members playing townspeople, dragged on for what seemed like hours. It was also difficult to follow, as many of the interviews had little to do with one another.

The fine cast did, however, redeem the play in the second act. There was much more action, and there was a general plot to follow, rather than a series of interviews. The play came to a climax when Matthew Shepard was pronounced dead after being in a coma for several weeks.

The play should have ended after the second act, as Shepard was dead, two hours had passed, and the effects of Shepard's death on the community had become quite apparent. Unfortunately for the audience, there was yet another act to come.

The third act covered what happened to Shepard's murderers, a story that could easily have been voiced-over at the end of the second act instead of drawn out over 40 minutes. Try as they might, the actors could

not compensate for the confusing and tedious storyline. This, in turn, made the act very difficult to sit through.

Despite its narrative problems and some vulgar elements—for example, random conversations about marijuana and excessive cursing—that distracted the audience from the actual story, the play was not without its high points.

In addition to the aforementioned spectacular second act, outstanding performances were turned in from almost every cast member, most notably seniors Diego Colon, Josh Solomon, Julia Macholl and junior Michael Budsik, who played several roles each. The police officer, played by senior Mallory Portnoy, was an especially interesting character, and Portnoy's acting was superb.

The Laramie Project was very creative choice on the part of the theatre department. Unfortunately, director Kevin Wall and company were saddled with Moises Kaufman's script, which lacked the clarity and action necessary to make the play an overall worthwhile experience.