

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THOMAS OUELLETTE AND JEN-SCOTT MOBLEY, DIRECTOR AND DRAMATURG, RESPECTIVELY, OF *LARAMIE/10*.

J-SM: Thomas, one of the questions I always like to ask directors is “why do this play now?” Why is it important to bring this particular play to the Annie Russell?

TO: In the play, Judy Shepard characterizes the decade that followed her son’s murder as, “Ten years of change, no progress.” Things continue to improve for the LGBT community and progress *is* being made—DOMA fell this summer¹—but we need to remain vigilant, visible, and vocal.

J-SM: Things are changing on the federal level but Florida, like Wyoming, has few legal protections for LGBT people and does not support marriage equality. In the play, Greg Pierotti says that a common response to the original *Laramie Project* is, “Laramie is just like my town.” Is Orlando like Laramie?

TO: I’ve lived in Central Florida since 1996, and I’ve seen Rollins make great strides on issues related to LGBTs during that time. In the play, a University of Wyoming employee refers to that campus as “a safe pocket” and Rollins is like that. But there is hate and fear here in Orlando. A month ago, on the day I held auditions for this show, coincidentally, a woman was attacked and raped on Bumby Avenue after leaving an LGBT nightclub called Revolution. According to news sources², two male attackers yelled anti-gay slurs, and taunted her with “I’ll show you what a real man feels like” even as they sexually assaulted her. Jen-Scott, that happened less than 5 miles from Rollins and exactly a month before our opening night. And you had that ugly encounter just off campus, on Fairbanks, right?

J-SM: Yup. I and a female colleague from our department were walking toward the parking garage following the *Laramie/10* “Prologue” event at the Winter Park Library and an SUV with 4 or 5 young men in it pulled up toward us and verbally harassed us yelling “DYKES!” before speeding off. We were stunned. Less than a block from campus.

TO: And ironically, neither you nor our colleague is gay. Hatred is terroristic. It affects all of us.

J-SM: Exactly. You decided to begin the show with a powerful YouTube clip from 2008 featuring Jonah Mowry? Why?

T: The 15-year anniversary of Matthew Shepard’s murder will occur one week after we close our production. But this is not a history play. Some things have improved since 1998, we can and should celebrate that, but many young people are still in great despair and the victims of bullying; some are harming themselves or considering suicide. I happened upon Jonah Mowry’s video while doing research

¹ There has been some progress at the federal level since the publication of the script in 2008. President Obama signed into law the Matthew Shepard & James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009, and he signed the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell Repeal Act,” in 2010. The “Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA),” which defines marriage as explicitly between man and a woman was struck down in June 2013 by the Supreme Court, enabling gay and lesbian couples to receive joint federal benefits in states that recognize same-sex marriage.

² http://mynews13.com/content/news/cfnews13/news/article.html/content/news/articles/cfn/2013/8/26/men_shout_anti_gay_s.html

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/breakingnews/os-rape-hate-crime-orlando-club-20130826,0,3009976.story>

for *Laramie/10* this summer. It broke my heart. Jonah's crying out and we must listen. Look, I'm not cut out to be a speechwriter or lobbyist. I'm a theatre artist, a storyteller. And that's what my students and I can do: tell these stories, the ugly ones and the redemptive ones.³

³ ART staff and cast members have reached out to Jonah Mowry and his dad, Kevin Mowry. Several of us have exchanged emails with Jonah. They both graciously endorsed our use of Jonah's video and they are eager to hear how it is received as a prologue for *Laramie/10* at Rollins.