



JILL MICHAEL and Stephen Tyrone Williams star in "The Laramie Project."

## An insightful exploration of homophobia in 'Laramie Project'

Play offers a glimpse into a community's self-examination.

In 1998, college student Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten and tied to a fence outside Laramie, Wyo., because he was gay. He died in the hospital six days later.

Consisting almost entirely of interviews with local residents, "The Laramie Project" is an insightful exploration of the circumstances surrounding Shepard's death. It opened off-Broadway in 2000 and at the Gallery Players in Brooklyn on Saturday night.

The tight ensemble of eight at Gallery plays more than 50 roles, ranging from clergy-

men to a bartender to the two young men who executed the beating. Actors bounce deftly in and out of characters and situations in a fluid collage of rapidly changing vignettes.

The result is a snapshot of a community seeped in self-examination, trying to figure out how such a thing could happen in its backyard. Both sharply etched and realistically blurry, the play reflects the town's confusion and contradiction, as reactions to Shepard's death range from compassionate shock to judgmental focus on his sexual orientation.

Director Neal Freeman creates a flow that's crisp but not rushed. He punctuates the action with video projection

### If you go

- Catch "The Laramie Project" at Gallery Players, 199 14th St., Brooklyn. For tickets and more information, call 212-352-3101 or visit [www.theatermania.com](http://www.theatermania.com).

that's usually effective, if a tad overused, and elicits skillful performances from his capable cast, with Kathy Cortez standing out as a police officer investigating the crime.

"Laramie" wisely refrains from sermonizing, allowing the words of the locals to speak for themselves, offering a forceful piece of theatrical journalism.

MICHAEL BRACKEN