

# First Stage: Young Company presents The Laramie Project

Posted on Tuesday, Nov 30, 2021

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**Milwaukee, WI - November 30, 2021** - First Stage's Young Company, the Theater Academy's award-winning training program for advanced high school actors, will present **THE LARAMIE PROJECT** as their first Performance Project for the 2021/22 season and first in-person production since the pandemic began. Written by award-winning playwright **Moisés Kaufman** and members of the Tectonic Theater Project, and directed by First Stage Young Company alum **Elyse Edelman**, this riveting production tells the story of 21-year-old Matthew Shepard, an openly gay college student, who was brutally beaten in October 1998 and left to die on the plains outside Laramie, Wyoming. Hailed as one of the most captivating and encompassing pieces of contemporary theater, THE LARAMIE PROJECT is a breathtaking collage that explores the depths to which humanity can sink and the heights of compassion of which it is capable. Sponsored by **United Performing Arts Fund**.

THE LARAMIE PROJECT runs **December 3 - 12, 2021** at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, located at 325 W. Walnut Street in downtown Milwaukee. Tickets are \$15. Tickets are available online at [firststage.org](http://firststage.org) or through the First Stage Box Office at (414) 267-2961. *Performance runtime is approximately two hours and twenty minutes, which includes two brief intermissions. Suggested for families and young people ages 13+.*

**Warning:** This play is based on a true story and includes strong language and mature content that some may find upsetting, including descriptions of

homophobia, violence and death.

Director **Elyse Edelman** shared her thoughts on the production: “THE LARAMIE PROJECT is a significant piece of theater history, and its relevance needs no debate. The artists who developed the play left us some guiding questions to answer: How did this happen? How do we breed monsters? It has been 23 years since Matthew Shepard’s tragic death, and I add the question: How do we measure change?”

I am truly inspired and impressed with the young actors in this cast. As actors in training the students are learning to chameleon into roles – transforming voice and body. And as artists they are appreciating that the role of actor and activist can be blended. They are equally passionate about truthful performances as they are about the message of the material.”

Added Young Company Director **Matt Daniels**: “THE LARAMIE PROJECT is an incredibly powerful piece of documentary theater which remains relevant 20 years after the events it discusses. Directed by Young Company alum **Elyse Edelman**, who is herself a master of transformation, a handful of student actors will play dozens of the citizens of Laramie, Wyoming as they explore the story of Matthew Shepard, who was lynched simply for being gay. This piece is a perfect fit for the Young Company’s signature minimalist, actor-driven performance projects, and I can’t wait to see it myself!”

Young Company Performance Projects are actor-driven presentations using elemental production values. By stripping down to a nearly bare stage, the connection of actor to audience is enhanced, and the words of the play come alive in exciting ways. These fully rehearsed studio projects allow First Stage’s award-winning students to showcase their graduate level skills with full-length material, from Shakespeare to American classics to pieces commissioned specially for them.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Moisés Kaufman (Playwright)** was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Obama in September 2016. He is also a Tony and Emmy-nominated director and playwright. Prior Broadway credits: *THE HEIRESS WITH JESSICA CHASTAIN*, *33 VARIATIONS* (which he also wrote) with Jane Fonda (5 Tony nominations); Rajiv Joseph's Pulitzer Prize finalist *BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD Zoo* with Robin Williams; the Pulitzer and Tony Award-winning play *I AM MY OWN WIFE*. Kaufman's next project is the first NY revival of Harvey Fierstein's *TORCH SONG TRILOGY* starring Michael Urie. His plays *GROSS INDECENCY: THE THREE TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE* and *THE LARAMIE PROJECT* are among the most performed plays in America over the last decade. Kaufman also co-wrote and directed the film adaptation of *The Laramie Project* for HBO, which received two Emmy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Writer. He is currently directing and writing a new Broadway-bound adaptation of Bizet's *CARMEN* with Grammy-winning composer Arturo O'Farrill. He's the artistic director of Tectonic Theater Project and a Guggenheim Playwrighting Fellow.

**Elyse Edelman (Director)** has loved working with the students of the First Stage Young Company on this important piece! Her professional Wisconsin theater credits include multiple productions with Forward Theater Company, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, American Players Theatre, Door Shakespeare, Renaissance Theaterworks, In Tandem Theatre and Milwaukee Repertory Theater. Some other regional theater credits include The Guthrie, Park Square Theatre, People's Centre Theatre (Minneapolis/St. Paul), Utah Shakespeare Festival (Cedar City), Chicago Children's Theatre, The Accidents (Chicago), and Riverside Theatre in the Park (Iowa City). Elyse is also a teaching artist and develops curriculum for several professional theaters in the state, including serving as Camp Director for Door Shakespeare's summer theater program. Training: University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater BFA Actor's Training Program. Website: [elyseedelman.com/](http://elyseedelman.com/)

**Matt Daniels (Director of Young Company/Artistic Associate)** is a frequent collaborator and Artistic Associate at First Stage, as an actor (*ESCAPE FROM PELIGRO ISLAND*, *A WRINKLE IN TIME*, *BIG RIVER: THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*, *THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEY OF EDWARD TULANE*, *A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS*, *ELLA ENCHANTED*, *SHREK THE MUSICAL* and *A MIDNIGHT CRY*, among others), director and movement director (Roald Dahl's *JAMES AND THE*

GIANT PEACH, THE SNOW and RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™ : THE MUSICAL, among others) and Director of First Stage's Young Company, where he teaches and directs (ELEPHANT & PIGGIE'S "WE ARE IN A PLAY!", THE MIRACLE WORKER, HENRY V, ANIMAL FARM and TXT U L8R, among others). Matt's other acting credits include appearances at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Milwaukee Opera Theatre, Renaissance Theaterworks, In Tandem Theatre and Milwaukee Shakespeare, as well as Forward Theater, Kentucky Repertory Theatre, Lake Geneva Theater Company, several regional Shakespeare Festivals and on many independent stages in New York. In addition to First Stage, his directing work has been seen at Door Shakespeare, MCT's New Play Development series, Sunset Playhouse and in New York with his company Tyrannosaurus rep. When at home, he enjoys making music with Il Bazzone's Jumping Flea Circus. Matt is a graduate of the Juilliard School Drama Division. [MattDanielsOnline.com](http://MattDanielsOnline.com)

**Jeff Frank (Artistic Director)** is recognized as one of the top directors in the field with an expertise in developing new work for the theater for young audience field. He holds a BFA in Theater from the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater, and an MFA in Child Drama from the University of Utah. Having served as First Stage's Education and Academy Director from 1996 - 2003, Jeff remains committed to the power of theater to transform lives and forever thankful to call First Stage home.

The Young Company cast for THE LARAMIE PROJECT includes: **Ryan Bennett** (Mequon) as Amanda Gronich/Lucy Thompson; **Austin Bock** (Muskego) as Sgt. Hing/Matt Galloway/Doug Laws/Sherry Aanenson; **Sabrina Borg** (Cedarburg) as Zackie Salmon/Margaret Murry/Baptist Minister/Priest/Kristin Price; **Rose Campbell** (Whitefish Bay) as Andy Paris/Russel Henderson's Mormon Home Teacher/Jen; **Jonathan Edwards** (Milwaukee) as Jon Peacock/Zubaida Ulla/Harry Woods/Shadow/April Silva; **Eloise Field** (Oconomowoc) as Doc O'Connor/Fred Phelps/ Minister's Wife/Rob Debree; **Aderyn Grace**(Milwaukee) as Alison Mears/Catherine Connolly/Conrad Miller/Kerry Drake; **Ana Gutierrez** (Milwaukee) as Mercedes Herrero/Foreperson; **Lucy Kuhnen-Grooms** (Shorewood) as Leigh Fondakowski/Bill McKinney; **Loralei Madson** (West Allis) as Narrator; **Elena Marking** (Franklin) as Stephen Belber/Cal Rerucha; **Kyra Mathias** (Oconomowoc) as Sherry Johnson/Governor/Reporter/Anonymous Friend of Andrew; **Molly**

**McVey**(Bayside) as Eileen Engen/Reggie Fluty/Matt Mickelson/Shannon; **Costello Mylott** (Milwaukee) as Phillip Dubois/Father Roger Schmidt/Russel Henderson/Tiffany Edwards; **Abram Nelson** (Whitefish Bay) as Aaron Kreifels/Jonas Slonaker/Email Writer/Phil Labrie; **Lola Onorato** (Milwaukee) as Barbara Pitts/Bailiff; **Angel Rivera** (Milwaukee) as Moises/Greg Pierotti/Judges/Jedediah Schultz; **Magdalyn Rowley-Lange**(Milwaukee) as Romaine Patterson/Stephen Mead Johnson/Dr. Cantway/Murdock Cooper/Waitress and **Elisheva Scheuer** (Bayside) as Rebecca Hilliker/Trish Steeger/Rulon Stacey/Aaron McKinney.

The Artistic Staff for THE LARAMIE PROJECT includes: **Elyse Edelman** (Director); **Amy Sue Hazel** (Scenic Coordinator); **Derek Buckles** (Sound Coordinator); **Latora Lezotte** (Costume Coordinator); **Megan Harris** (Stage Manager) and **Charley Vader Molen** (Stage Management Intern).

**Tickets are \$15** - Tickets may be purchased at [firststage.org](https://www.firststage.org) or by phone (414) 267-2961.

**COVID Protocols:** First Stage COVID safety protocols can be viewed here: [firststage.org/plan-your-visit/safety-security/ - performances](https://www.firststage.org/plan-your-visit/safety-security/-performances)

## FACT SHEET

**What:** First Stage Young Company presents: THE LARAMIE PROJECT

**Location:** The Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, 325 W. Walnut Street, Milwaukee

**Dates:** December 3 - 12, 2021

**Description:** In October 1998, 21-year-old Matthew Shepard, an openly gay college student, was brutally beaten and left to die on the plains outside Laramie, Wyoming. Hailed as one of the most captivating and encompassing pieces of contemporary theater, THE LARAMIE PROJECT is a breathtaking collage that explores the depths to which humanity can sink and the heights of compassion of which we are capable. *Approximate running time is two hours and twenty minutes, with two brief intermissions. Suggested for families with young people ages 13+.*

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**Performances:**

- Friday, December 3 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, December 4 at 1:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.
- Sunday, December 5 at 1:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.
- Friday, December 10 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, December 11 at 1:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.
- Sunday, December 12 at 1:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.

**Ticket and information:** Tickets are \$15. Call (414) 267-2961 or online at: [firststage.org](http://firststage.org)