

MERCY KILLING or...

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The Tracy Latimer story

TUESDAY DEC 2 TO SATURDAY DEC 6, 2003

at Secret Theatre, EPCOR Centre for Performing Arts

Tickets: 264.3224 • Info: www.stage-left.org or 242.3108

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Funded by...



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Produced by...



Presented by...



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Performance Presenter

One Yellow Rabbit

Michael Green
Co-Artistic Director



I see a lot of shows.

As co-artistic of One Yellow Rabbit, and especially in my role as curator for the annual High Performance Rodeo, I make it my business to educate myself with regard to what is happening on the stages of this country. Theatre, dance, music, performance art: so far this year I have observed almost 250 comedies, tragedies, symphonies and installations. You can imagine that not everything I see leaves a lasting impression. And you would be correct if you speculated that my passion for live art flags a little from time to time. But every now and then, on perhaps four or five occasions a year, I am fortunate enough to see something that reignites my passion.

I had just such an experience a few years ago when I was invited to attend a matinee performance of a retrospective by a company whose ensemble integrated artists with various disabilities. Let me explain: How often have you sat in a theatre and thought to yourself, "Why am I here? Why are all these other people sitting here with me when we could be doing so many other things? Why are those people onstage performing this? What's the purpose of all this?" I think you get the point.

But that sunny afternoon, in a dark theatre in the basement of the Centre for Performing Arts, I was bothered by no such questions. It was clear to me why the artists onstage were engaged in their activity. There were no questions about why any of us were there. My role as spectator was clearly integral to the entire event. My eyes were reopened that day and my heart was reconnected to some of the most basic functions of the performing arts: Communication, communion, expression, emancipation.

One Yellow Rabbit finds itself in a position to assist in a vital endeavor, and it is with great pride that we are able to present the third annual Disability Arts Festival, for which **Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story** is the mainstage production. At this dynamic event you will hear voices from one of our culture's more marginalized communities. Urgent, questioning, challenging, funny, these voices are as varied as any other community. I expect you will ask yourself a lot of questions during the performance. But I doubt that one of them will be, "Why?"



Performance Producer

Stage Left Productions

Michele Decottignies
Artistic Director



Robert Latimer's murder case stole national headlines for a long, long time during his many trials and appeals. Quite obviously, and - in our opinion - deliberately, the voices and the perspectives of those with disabilities themselves were lacking in the mainstream media deluge around his case.

Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story is our attempt to present some facts about the case that were not often made public and to offer up the voices that were seldom heard: those of people with disabilities. As a result, the lines the actors with disabilities speak in this play are mostly their own (their opinions and feelings about this case were an integral part of the development of the show).

All but a couple of the lines spoken by the characters of Robert and Laura Latimer in this play are direct quotations from media coverage or trial transcripts. Most of the lines spoken by the Reporter, the Judges, the Lawyer, and the Witnesses are also direct quotations from media coverage and/or trial transcripts.

We have not put many words into the mouths of these characters, choosing instead to let what they said in real life represent their perspective in the play. We are not implying that the way we have chosen to portray these real people is how they truly are in life. The characters in our play represent only our opinion and our perspective of the Robert Latimer case, and the public figures involved in it. We mean no disrespect to any of the people depicted in our play - especially Tracy.

Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story was funded through Artists and Community Collaboration Funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and through a Project funding from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Our thanks to both these organizations.



Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story

Production Notes



On October 24, 1993, Robert Latimer took his young daughter's life. He thought about killing her for weeks and, after mulling over many options, he finally killed her. He then put her body back in her bed and waited until she was found by his wife, Laura. He initially denied any involvement, telling his family and the police that Tracy died in her sleep. After an initial investigation clearly pointed to homicide, Latimer admitted he killed Tracy. He was immediately arrested for first degree murder, not second degree, because he had planned it.

Under legal council, however, Latimer claimed that he had no choice but to kill Tracy because she was in "constant, excruciating pain" because of her disability. This defense was accepted in court and widely reported in the media. But necessity, as a legal defense, does not exist in Canadian law. After one trial, three appeals, and many years, Latimer was finally sentenced to ten years in jail - the mandatory minimum sentence for second degree murder. The outcry against his sentence was unprecedented in Canada.

How did Robert Latimer stay out of jail for so long? Why was his necessity defense allowed in court when it doesn't exist in law? And why, when he clearly planned his daughter's murder, was he only convicted of second degree murder rather than first degree?

Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story explores this timely and controversial topic. As medical ethics promises the elimination of disability and disease from our society, so too does it evoke concerns about eugenics and the elimination of difference and diversity among us. This production explores the extreme positions taken during Latimer's trials and offers up the voices that were seldom heard amidst the dialogue around his case: those of people with physical and developmental disabilities, just like Tracy Latimer's.

Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story

Production Credits



Created By...

Michele DecottigniesProducer/Writer/Director
Shelly Hering:Assistant Producer & Choreographer
Nancy Nassef, Jamie Popoff & Jenny RepondDramaturges
Shandra PritchardStage Manager
Ruby Eustaquio & Laurel Oneil:Assistant Stage Managers
Sarah BrownriggAssistant to the Disabled Actors
Justin MachnikVideo & Sound
Cimмерon MeyerLighting Design
Robert Pritchard & Charles DecottigniesSet Construction
Heather PlewesPublicist
Leanne SquairOpening Gala Coordinator
Lisa HariClosing Gala Coordinator

Performed By...

Lee DavisQuasimodo, dying husband & himself
James Doylemovie critic & himself
Jerry Gliwinskithe voice of the audience & himself
Donald Normanmovie critic, court stenographer & himself
Tia SrivastavaSchool girl/daughter (in film)
Shari Lakha-EvinTracy Latimer (in film)
Jamie PopoffRobert Latimer, Frolo, Doctor & others
Jenny RepondLaura Latimer, Esmerelda, Wife & others
Laurel OneilJudge, Peasant, Coroner & others
Bonnie BlasettiReporter, Witnesses, Peasant & others
Stafford PerryLawyer, Narrator, Husband, Const. Hartle & others
Rodney AtkinsonSchool boy/hunk (in film)
Shandra PritchardSchool girl/friend (in film)

Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story

Production Team



Michele Decottignies: Producer, Writer & Director
Michele has over fifteen years experience in all aspects of theater-making and is trained in film and video production. She also has three years of teacher training, with a focus on popular education. Michele has worked extensively in community development, using the arts to affect personal and social transformation in different communities such as First Nations, disability, and lesbian & culturally diverse youth.



Shelly Hering: Assistant Producer & Choreographer
Shelly has been in the performing arts for over 15 years and enjoys using a variety of mediums to perform, create and communicate. Her passion lies in the ability of dance and performing arts to entertain while being a powerful and influential medium for sociopolitical messages. She is interested in ideas relating to or involving society's assumptions and expectations of people with varying ability and disability.



Shandra Pritchard: Stage Manager
Shandra is thrilled to be working with such an amazing group of people. She has stage managed *Solocentric Festival*, *Filth (OYR)*, *Macbeth (U of L)*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Cinderella (New West Theatre)*. Shan was also the Technical Director for *Theatre Xtra (U of L)* and Lighting Designer for *Not About Heroes (Third Eye Collective)*. Currently she is a TA for Bishop Carroll's drama program and the front of house bunny at OYR.



Ruby Estaquio: Assistant Stage Manager
A graduating student at the University of Calgary, Ruby is looking forward to starting her career in Stage Management. She just completed stage managing a mainstage show at U of C, *Rocket To The Moon*, directed by Joe-Norman Shaw. Ruby is excited to work with Michele and the the Disability Arts Festival for the second time.

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Production Team



Laurel Oneil: Assistant Stage Manager
A recent graduate of the U of L, Laurel is excited to enter the professional world of theatre. A few of her acting credits include: *The Visit (Roby)*, *The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie (Women)*, *Lilly*, *Alta*. (Poppy & Constance), *When They Talk (Sarah)*, . Expanding her experience behind the scenes, she has stage managed *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *Lonely Hearts* & *Heartbreak House*. Laurel is glad to join Stage Left in this wonderful experience.



Justin Machnik: Video & Sound Artist
Justin is passionate about film and loves to create videos that stimulate healthy discussion. His interest in video evolved in the last few years through courses in screenwriting, directing, and editing as well as through the creation of several videos for a local youth ministry. Justin has a desire to affect society through film, and especially to teach youth that film can be more than just entertainment.



Heather Plewes: Publicist
Heather is a fourth year Community Rehabilitation/Disability Studies student at U of C. Her participation in the Festival reflects her desire to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities. She thinks that this Festival provides them with a strong voice and reduces the fear that society has toward disabled people. Her future plans include training at U of A as an Occupational Therapist.



Cimmeron Meyer: Lighting Designer
Cimmeron would like to thank Stage Left for letting her be a part of this cool festival. Past Lighting Design credits include: *Irma Vep*, *Laura*, *Funeral Ladies*, *Misery*, *Beautiful Lake Winnipeg*, *Dangerous Obsession*, and others for Vertigo Mystery Theatre. Other selected credits include *Dream Machine*, *Sign Language*, and *Featherland* for One Yellow Rabbit; and *Lime* and *Popular* for Decidedly Jazz Danceworks.

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Performing Artists



Lee Davis has been a member of Stage Left since the company started doing artist-community collaborations in 1999. His previous roles include BJ the Bully in *School Dayz*, Ralph Klein in *The Protest*, the Chair of the PDD Board in *The Appeal*, and a Specimen in *As I Am*. Despite his disability, Lee was the first person in his family to graduate from Mount Royal College. Lee is active in curling, baseball, bowling, and other sports. He works at Mark's Work Wearhouse.



James Doyle is 20 years old, with a brain injury that he's had since he was 6. His hobbies are acting, writing scripts, listening to music, and watching TV, movies, and plays. James likes drama because he likes to play people other than himself. He also likes the challenge of doing a good role. He first started acting in church pageants. Then he took drama in school, playing the role of a wolf and another as Angel in *All Angels Please Come to Order*. This is his second show with Stage Left.



Jerry Gliwinski has a developmental disability which doesn't stop him from doing anything! He attends MRC's TVP program, delivers fliers, plays Wheel of Fortune on the computer, attends church, and participates in both Stage Left's drama classes and annual mainstage performance. A member of Stage Left since 1999, Jerry has been using his quick wit and humor to keep us all in good spirits for a long time now. He is drama because, as he says himself, "it's easy and fun!"



Donald Norman is a survivor of a brain injury, caused by a stroke. He is a proud father and also an impassioned self-advocate. Currently a member of the Disability Action Hall, he was once the main force behind the apologies and settlements given by the Catholic Church to boys physically and sexually abused in their care (of whom Donald was one). Don is a kind, gentle person and also a prankster because he feels laughter is a very important thing in life!

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Performing Artists



Tia Srivastava is a grade twelve student at St. Francis High School. She has been in a few plays at school and two with Stage Left. Tia is active in Special Olympics with skiing and swimming. She also likes to do pottery/ceramics. Tia is a social butterfly who likes spending time with her friends, listening to music, going shopping, and cooking (she likes eating too, especially what she makes in her foods class at school and the brownies she says she makes for Michele!).



Shari Evin is a teen-aged girl who has cerebral palsy much the same as Tracy Latimer's. Shari attends The Emily Follensby School and has a very active life, participating in Disabled Skiing, swimming, and other community activities. She spends much of her free time watching and going to movies, getting her nails painted and her hair done, dressing up for her beauty culture class in school, and enjoying the love of her family and friends.



Jenny Repond is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Solocentric Theatre and Dance. When not producing the Solocentric Festival, Jenny is a writer, director, performer and choreographer. She recently performed a new solo creation entitled *Red, White & Rumour* at the Solocentric Festival and is currently finishing her MFA at the University of Calgary (well, let's all keep our fingers crossed for her...she needs it).



Jamie Popoff is an MFA student at U of C. His most recent acting credits include roles in *Moving Day* and *Prophecy of Shri (Quest)* and *The Cherry Orchard* and *Temptation* (U of C). Last year his play, *Inheritance*, was professionally workshopped after winning the Discovery Category of the Alberta Playwriting Competition. Jamie wants to thank Stage Left for this valuable experience as well as Julie and the kids for their continual support and inspiration.

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Performing Artists



Bonnie Blasetti is a recent U of C graduate. Her acting credits include *Les Belles Soeurs*, *Remembrance of Miracles*, *Taming of the Shrew* & *Uncle Vanya*. Her directing credits include *She Ventures and He Wins*, *Perfect Pie*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Grease*, *As I Am* & *Motherless Pig*. Bonnie works with Trickster Theatre and has taught at MRC Theatre Company, Quest & CYPT. Bonnie wishes to thank her family for being present and inspiring. Jass you are my music.



Laurel Oneil is a recent graduate of the U of L and is excited to enter the professional world of theatre. A few of her acting credits include: *The Visit* (Roby), *The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie* (Women), *Lilly*, *Alta*. (Poppy & Constance), *When They Talk* (Sarah), . Expanding her experience behind the scenes, she has stage managed *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *Lonely Hearts* & *Heartbreak House*.



Stafford Perry is a second year drama student at the University of Calgary. Some of his acting credits include *Rocket to the Moon*, *The Crucible*, *She Ventures and He Wins*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *The Mighty Pen* and *Blighted Life*, *Sexxy*, and *The Proposal*. Stafford is extremely excited to be in this year's Disability Arts Festival.



Sarah Brownrigg is a graduate of Lakehead U where she attained a BA in psychology. She recently moved to Calgary to join U of C's Community Rehabilitation/Disability Studies program. In the past few years, her connection to the arts has been primarily in the fine arts; however, she was extensively involved with her high school's drama program. Her work with Stage Left has allowed her to gain great insight into community development and disability culture.

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Producing Company



Stage Left integrates marginalized people into the creative, artistic, and social life of our community by providing a safe and accessible space in which they can explore, define, and celebrate their culture; develop confidence, imagination, and artistic expression; contribute to the culture of our community in meaningful ways; and express both individual and collective identity.



We also try to use the arts to enable marginalized people to establish a visible presence in the larger community, increasing awareness of specific issues and fostering an appreciation of diverse cultures through the presentation of authentic, dynamic, and non-sentimental images of personal experiences.



Stage Left Productions utilizes a highly specialized, interdisciplinary theater practice. This practice is a combination of Popular Theater and Theater of the Oppressed genres with Collaborative Performance Creation techniques. The Stage Left model is highly centered around the participants - we do not use actors to tell a community about its own experiences; instead, we engage the community itself in a creative, dynamic, and radical process of discovering, representing, and transforming its own experiences.



Stage Left also uses a participatory, performing arts-based community development practice to provide people with constructive, creative, and solution-oriented avenues of self-expression. We use the performing arts to build consciousness and to mobilize people. And we use a dynamic reflection/action model to encourage people to examine their relationships to self and community, and to bridge the gaps between individual concerns and larger social structures.

**Using the arts to affect
personal & social transformation.**