

MOISÉS KAUFMAN

AWARD-WINNING THEATER DIRECTOR

b. November 21, 1963

**“The Laramie Project”
(2000), about the murder
of Mathew Shepard,
is one of the
most-produced plays.**

“Art is a great prism through which we can understand history and current events.”

Moisés Kaufman is an award-winning theater director and playwright. His work is known for its bold, perceptive portrayals of contemporary social issues, particularly those of sexuality and culture. His groundbreaking play, “The Laramie Project,” inspired by the brutal killing of a gay college student, Mathew Shepard, generated worldwide empathy and dialogue around LGBT hate crimes.

Born in Venezuela, Kaufman grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family. As a youth, he was exposed to avant-garde theater. While working toward a business degree in Caracas, he joined an experimental theater group and toured as an actor.

In 1987 Kaufman moved to Manhattan to study theater direction at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. Recognizing the originality of Kaufman’s ideas, Arthur Bartow, the university’s dean, advised him at graduation, “No one will hire you. You should start your own theater company.”

In 1991 Kaufman and his husband, Jeffrey LaHoste, founded the experimental Tectonic Theater Project, dedicated to developing consciousness-raising, innovative works that push the boundaries of theatrical language and form. In its early years, the cash-strapped troupe rehearsed in the couple’s apartment. Under Kaufman’s artistic direction, Tectonic eventually flourished. The theater company has since created and staged more than 20 plays and musicals. Many, including the “The Laramie Project,” “Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde” and “33 Variations,” have garnered international acclaim.

Shortly after the murder of Mathew Shepard in 1998, Kaufman took his Manhattan-based theater company to Laramie, Wyoming, the small college town where the crime occurred. They conducted more than 400 hours of interviews with 200 local residents. Kaufman used the conversations to write and produce “The Laramie Project.” The play, which premiered in 2000, became one of the most-produced works of the decade. It has been performed worldwide in theaters and schools and used to educate people about homophobia. Kaufman also wrote and directed a screen adaptation that was released on HBO in 2002.

Kaufman has earned numerous accolades for his work, including an Obie Award for his Broadway directorial debut, “I Am My Own Wife”; two Tony Award nominations: one for “I Am My Own Wife” and one for “33 Variations”; the Outer Critics Award for “Gross Indecency”; and two Emmy nominations for “The Laramie Project.” In 2009 President Obama invited Kaufman and Tectonic to witness the signing of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. In 2016 President Obama presented Kaufman with the National Medal of Arts.



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