

Play tackles Prop 8 issue

Victoria Wright

Arts and Culture Editor

It differed from your average play — no costumes, elaborate lighting or sets — but the issue it covered was prominent.

Visitors gathered in the Ula Love Doughty Carousel Theatre for a reading of the play “8,” which covers controversial constitutional amendment Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in California.

The play was presented by UT’s Commission for LGBT People, UT Theatre Department, Issues Committee and the UT chapter of Amnesty International.

Dimi Venkov, senior in theatre and director of the performance, said the inspiration to bring the play to UT stemmed from when he saw the play being read by George Clooney in Los Angeles.

“Directing ‘8’ was very different,” Venkov said. “Focusing on the words (no acting, no fancy designs, no effects) was much simpler and less stressful. The script is already so well written — we just worked to convey it clearly to the audience. Of course we all learn with practice, so

this was inevitably going to be an easier process as I learn from mistakes of the past.”

Written by Dustin Lance Black, Academy Award-winning screenwriter of the movie “Milk,” the script is based on the case *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*. Performers read from case testimonials and court transcripts, with one of the primary reasons backing Proposition 8 was the detrimental effects gay and lesbian marriages would have on heterosexual unions.

Though the play was read the night before the presidential elections, Venkov said there was no significance behind the date. But the coincidence of it

served as an opportunity to remind people of the issue before they visited the polls.

“I think the date enabled us to remind people of an issue that has been largely forgotten in the national election cycle,” Venkov said. “Four states have ballot initiatives today regarding same-sex marriage, so hopefully the issue gains momentum again so individuals around the country can marry the person with which they have fallen in love, sooner rather than later.”

The cast read to a full audience with nothing more than a spotlight hovering above them. The mood was serious, but scattered through the reading were humorous moments.

Venkov said many of the cast members were new to the stage.

“They were not actors onstage; they were ordinary individuals making rational arguments for marriage equality. And they were wonderful,” Venkov said.

After the reading, audience members stayed for a panel discussion with cast and same-sex marriage advocates.

Jessica Alexander, senior in theatre, enjoyed the performance.

“I wish we had more things like this on campus that were more informative,” Alexander said. “I just really support the cause and what

they’re trying to do.”

Venkov, though hopeful to spread a message, said that the performance was more so a motivational tool than an attempt to sway opinions.

“I realize that we probably didn’t change minds last night. We were probably preaching to the choir. However, I hope people took away a structured, rational model for how to fight for marriage equality. This kind of step-by-step model is useful for the future fight in Tennessee. This is an issue where we can take advantage of public policy. Eventually, our votes will matter,” Venkov said.



• Photo courtesy of Out Boulder

A stage reading of the play “8” generated discussion about the California measure that struck down gay marriage in 2008.

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