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Play remembers Oklahoma bombing

An academic from Northumbria University, Newcastle, has written a new play to mark the 20th anniversary of the Oklahoma Bombing.

The play, written by Northumbria's Director of Performing Arts, Steve Gilroy, will be performed by Oklahoma City University (OCU) students this month as part of its anniversary project to remember the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

OCU commissioned Steve, an award-winning playwright, due to his expertise in verbatim theatre – a form of documentary for the stage based on personal interviews and transcripts. Steve then worked with OCU students and staff to

conduct more than 35 interviews with family members of victims, survivors, local officials and first responders.

Steve said: “Often, during the verbatim process, interviewers have to work quite hard to coax stories from people. For this project, however, there was an incredible honesty that I haven’t seen before in any other project that I have done.

“People talked openly about their experience of the bombing; however, they also shared all sorts of different stories that say a lot about peoples’ ability to recover. They find themselves 20 years later when they are no longer defined by what’s happened and are able to open new chapters in their lives.”

“The overwhelming message that comes from everybody interviewed for this project is the regeneration of the city as the background, but I think in the end, it is going to be about these very powerful individual stories that, when woven together, are going to create a much bigger human story about recovery.”

OCU Associate Dean of Theatre, Brian Parsons, has a vision for the play beyond the April production and would like every high school in Oklahoma to have access to the play by creating an educational package that includes scripts, a documentary made by OCU about the making of the play and a teacher’s resource pack.

He said: “We have a unique opportunity and responsibility to respond through art. This work is a living memorial and celebration of the tenacity, recovery and healing process of Oklahoma City.

Steve’s previous works include the award-winning Motherland, which toured the UK in 2009 sharing the stories of women whose everyday lives were touched by the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also wrote The Prize, in collaboration with senior lecturer, Richard Stockwell, sharing the true stories of Olympic successes and coinciding with London 2012.

Verbatim theatre forms an integral part of the performing arts experience at Northumbria. Steve’s work has previously been performed by students in the UK, with States of Descent being staged as part of Northumbria Performing Arts degree showcase at Northern Stage. Northumbria also commissioned a

student writer from New York University, Lilia Rubin, whose play, The Fall, based on letters from the families of victims of 9/11 was performed by students as part of their performing arts showcase in 2014.

The Oklahoma City Bombing Project, directed by OCU instructor Courtney DiBello, will be performed at OCU's Burg Theatre between 16 and 19 April. All performances are free to the public. A proportion of the proceeds from the play's publication will be donated to the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum.

To find out more about studying Performing Arts at Northumbria visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/arts or sign up to the open days on 26 and 27 June by visiting www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday.

For further information about OCU's anniversary project, visit www.okcu.edu.

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