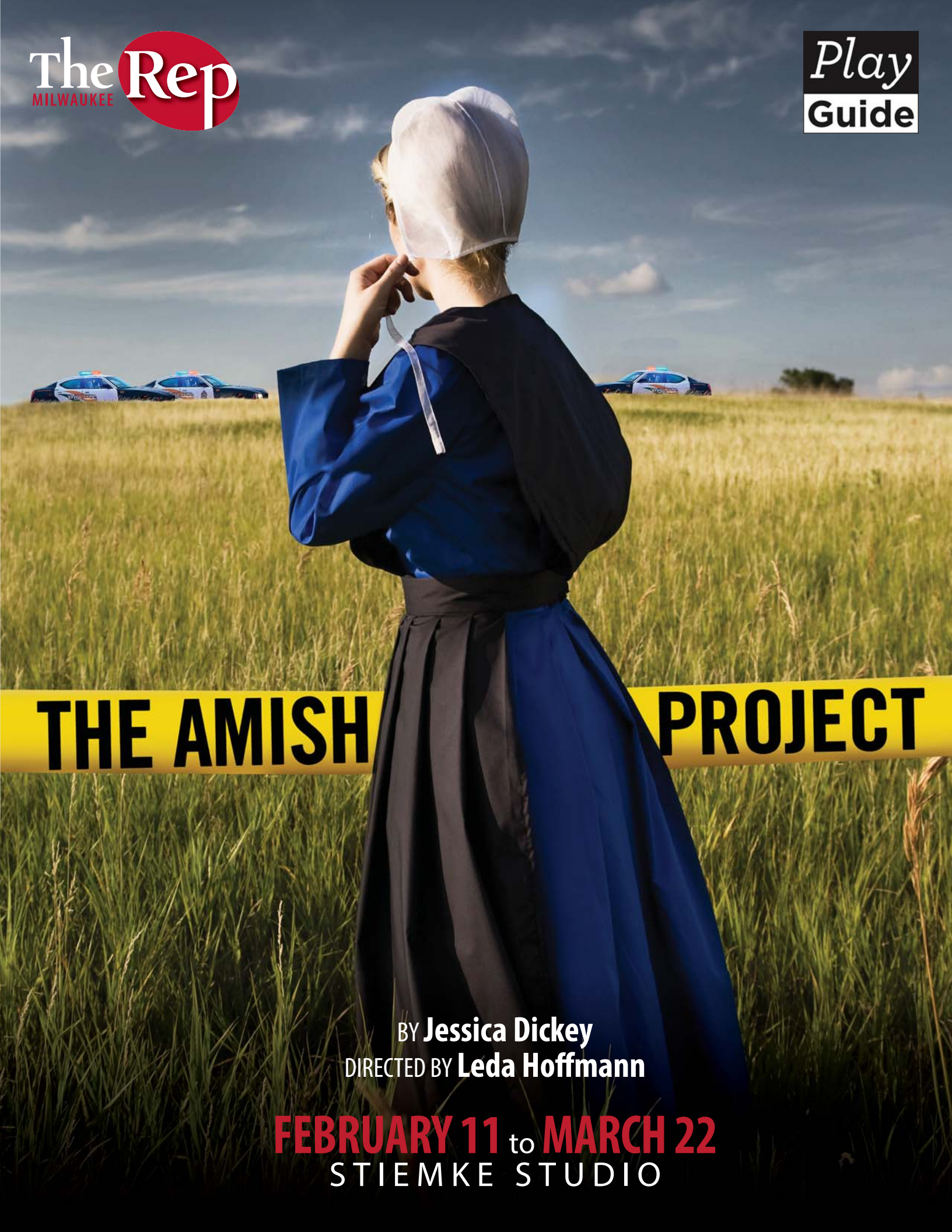
The Rep
MILWAUKEE
Play Guide
THE AMISH PROJECT
BY Jessica Dickey
DIRECTED BY Leda Hoffmann
FEBRUARY 11 to MARCH 22
STIEMKE STUDIO

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*Artistic Director*

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## Milwaukee Repertory Theater presents

# THE AMISH PROJECT

**FEBRUARY 11 – MARCH 22, 2015**
*STIEMKE STUDIO*
BY **Jessica Dickey**
DIRECTED BY **Leda Hoffmann**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS



THE STIEMKE STUDIO SEASON IS SPONSORED BY
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# ABOUT THE PLAY

*The Amish Project* opens with the headline, "Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse and Opens Fire." From here, the audience meets seven distinctly different people who have been profoundly affected by the shooting of ten girls in a one-room Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. The one-woman show quickly moves from one character to the next, one story to another, one moment to the following in these characters' lives. As the cultures clash and harmonize through tragedy and forgiveness, the audience is transported beyond the headlines to the emotional core of this story that gripped our nation nine years ago.

How can forgiveness exist in light of so much sadness? How can one ever continue on in the face of such devastating loss? How are our roles as individuals and community members changed in moments such as these? These characters try to negotiate these questions while struggling with their own realities in connection with this tragic event.

# THE CHARACTERS

**Anna** – Amish girl, age 14. Victim of the shooting.

**Carol Stuckey** – Widow of the gunman, age 31. English/non-Amish.

**Velda** – Amish girl, age 6. Sister of Anna. Victim of the shooting.

**Bill North** – English/non-Amish man, 50s. Scholar and professor on Amish culture, as well as friend and spokesman to several Amish families affected by the shooting.

**America** – Hispanic girl, age 16. Pregnant. Works in local grocery store.

**Eddie Stuckey** – The gunman of schoolhouse shooting, age 33. English/non-Amish.

**Sherry Local** – English/non-Amish woman, age 53. Resident of Nickel Mines, PA.

# CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

**DEBORAH STAPLES**
***Actor***

**LEDA HOFFMANN**
***Director***

**COURTNEY O'NEILL,** ***Scenic Designer***
**LESLIE VAGLICA,** ***Costume Designer***
**JASON FASSL,** ***Lighting Designer***
**VICTORIA DEIORIO,** ***Original Music & Sound Designer***
**JILL WALMSLEY ZAGER,** ***Dialect Coach***
**JC CLEMENTZ,** ***Casting Director***
**PHILIP MUEHE,** ***Assistant Director***
**SARAH HOFFMANN,** ***Stage Manager***
**MARGUERITE FREY,** ***Stage Management Intern***

# A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

Photo credit: playwrightshorizons.org

I have learned through the making of *The Amish Project* that the boundary between fact and fiction is a fraught one; it feels appropriate to open a window into my negotiation with that boundary.

The facts: *The Amish Project* is a fictional exploration of a true event. I absorbed a great deal about the Nickel Mines shooting just from watching the news when it occurred, and so in preparation for writing the play, I focused my attention on researching the Amish themselves. Once the play was written and the characters firmly established, I included details about the shooting that I felt would strengthen the texture of the play.

The fiction: I was highly aware through the entire process that somewhere out there are the real people who went through this event – the widow of the Nickel Mines gunman and her children, the Amish families of the girls who were targeted in the shooting . . . In an effort to balance the conflicting desires to remain sensitive to the real people who were affected by the shooting, while giving myself creative license to write an unflinching play, I purposefully did not research the gunman or his widow, nor did I conduct any interviews of any kind. The characters in *The Amish Project* are fictional, and should not be misconstrued as real people.

The play: July 28th, 2008, my director and I traveled to Nickel Mines to find the location of the shooting. We had read that without an informed guide, it was nearly impossible to find, as shortly after the event the Amish tore down the school and replanted the area so that it is now a simple field where animals graze. The only indications of where the shooting occurred are three maple trees.

As we drove through the small intersection of farmland that is Nickel Mines, I realized that every person we saw, gardening or hanging clothes on the line, had likely grieved the loss of a child or the children of friends . . . As the sun was setting and we stood quietly looking at the three maple trees and the vacant space where they used to shade the one room schoolhouse, I could feel tragedy that had occurred here, but even more I could feel the presence of those we had passed en route, the people who carry the memory of that day with them . . .

It is my private prayer that this play, should they ever know about it, would not hurt them further, but somehow honor the goodness they forged in the face of such tragedy. In my mind, that is the legacy of the Nickel Mines shooting.

-Jessica Dickey

Jessica Dickey in *The Amish Project*
Photo credit: Geoff Green / Playbill.com

# THE TRAGEDY IN NICKEL MINES

A grazing pasture for animals, an area marked by trees: this simple, undisturbed landscape is all that denotes the site where the West Nickel Mines Amish School used to stand. Located in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, the one-room schoolhouse once served as a center of education for nearly thirty Amish students from three local church districts. Then, on October 2, 2006, a man named Charles Carl Roberts IV walked through its doors.

After sending away the boys and the adults, Roberts had the remaining ten girls, ages six to thirteen, line up along the chalkboard while he bound their hands and feet. Though the amount of supplies Roberts had brought suggested he had planned on a long siege, shortly after his arrival, the police pulled up to the site. They had responded to a 9-1-1 call made by one of the classroom's teachers who had been released. During the ensuing hostage stand-off, Roberts called his wife, mentioning some long-ago offense for which he sought retribution. He told her he would not be returning home. Though reports have speculated about his motivation for the attack, most agreed that it was not directed specifically at the Amish community. Instead—from the suicide notes left behind and his telephone calls—it appears Roberts was struggling with built up issues from his past; he was "angry at life, he was angry at God," said Commissioner Jeffery B. Miller. Acknowledging his inevitable arrest, this anger led Roberts to systematically shoot all ten girls.

The hostage crisis ended with the deaths of five of the girls—two of whom died in hospitals after the attack—and Roberts' own suicide. Left behind was a community of both Amish and "English" (non-Amish) citizens, reeling from the horror of the situation, trying to come to terms with the aftermath. How such violence could happen in a community built on pacifism, committed by a man many only knew as a loving husband, father, and co-worker, defied belief. Still, in the light of such tragedy sprung something no one expected: forgiveness.

"It's very important that we teach the children not to think evil of the man who did this," said Ruben Fisher, grandfather of one of the murdered girls. This emphasis on forgiveness was expressed

**West Nickel Mines Amish School**
**Photo credit: Matt Rourke**

by the entire Nickel Mines Amish community. Fisher, along with other Amish members, visited the Roberts family, consoling them and offering forgiveness. A charity fund was set up for the victims' families, and the Amish included the Roberts family as recipients. Many Amish expressed that the Roberts family had a greater load to bear because "not only must they bear grief for losing the shooter, but also the shame and guilt." Roberts' widow was one of the few English invited to the girls' funerals, while some Amish attended Roberts' funeral in turn. The Amish dealt with their own grief privately, despite the throng of reporters and media that stormed Lancaster County. The five girls were dressed in white and buried in pine coffins near the school site. The aftermath no doubt was, and still is, fraught with heartache, though the victims' families are recovering "through God's help," says Fisher. Meeting about once every other month, these families gather to support each other. The community continues to care for the surviving girls, who are dealing with physical and psychological scars. Roberts' mother visits one wheelchair-bound girl weekly, reading and singing to her.

Ten days after the shooting, in the middle of the night, the schoolhouse was torn down. The Amish do not build memorials or monuments, so instead they planted a tree for each girl: Anna, Lena, Marian, Mary, and Naomi.

**Trees serve as a memorial, and mark the place where the schoolhouse once stood.**
**Photo credit: Bill Uhrich**

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ALLUSIONS

***Ordnung*:** unwritten guidelines that form a code for Amish living. The German translation means "order". The *Ordnung's* purpose is to create a stable community and guide members in Christian living. It regulates style of dress, transportation, amenities, marital relations, and interaction with the non-Amish. Instead of restricting members, it prevents pride and envy, encourages a humble spirit, and emphasizes community strength.

***Uffgeva*:** similar to the German word, *Gelassenheit*, meaning submission or yielding to a higher authority. Both terms assume a "giving up" and "a self-surrender, accepting God's will, yielding to others, self-denial, contentment, and a quiet spirit." Alongside the *Ordnung* it asks for a shunning of certain contemporary "comforts," such as telephones and cars.

**English:** An Amish term to refer to non-Amish people and the non-Amish world.

***Martyrs Mirror*:** a book written and published in 1660 by Dutch Mennonite Thieleman J. van Braght that contains more than 4,000 accounts of Anabaptist martyrs, the Amish forefathers. It is an incredibly popular Amish text, the most well-known story being that of Dirk Willems from 1569.

**Barn raising:** an Amish community "frolic" where members gather to build or rebuild a barn for a family in the community. The physical labor is completed by the men while women prepare a meal for sometimes up to 200 people. Like other "frolics", a barn raising turns a practical goal into a social event. The number of barn raisings are diminishing as communities now have fewer farmers.

Amish barn raising near Westby, WI
Photo credit: Westby Times

**The Prayer of St. Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy;
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so
much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

*I must be a Christian child,*
*Gentle, patient, meek and mild;*
*Must be honest, simple, true*
*In my words and actions too.*
*I must cheerfully obey,*
*Giving up my will and way. . .*
*Must remember, God can view*
*All I think, and all I do.*
*Glad that I can know I try,*
*Glad that children such as I,*
*In our feeble ways and small,*
*Can serve Him who loves us all.*

*-lines of verse from an Amish school booklet*

Dirk Willems rescuing his captor
Image credit: Graber Designs

***Rumspringa*:** a Pennsylvania Dutch term usually translated as "running around." During the *Rumspringa* period, which usually begins at age sixteen, youth are allowed into the outside world on their own in social groups. As they are not yet baptized members, they are not subject to the church's rules about permitted and forbidden behavior. Some youth indulge in rather tame behavior—such as going to the movie theater—while others experiment with drugs and alcohol. The period ends when they agree to be baptized into the church and become a fully-fledged adult member, complete with adhering to adult regulations and responsibilities. The idea behind *Rumspringa* is to give youth a taste of the outside world, satisfying their curiosity and inviting them to personally choose membership with the church. Between 80-90% of youth become Amish church members.

**Anabaptists:** from the New Latin *anabaptista* meaning "one who is rebaptized", the term originally described Reformation-era Christians who rejected infant baptism in favor of a believer's baptism. They also believed strongly in the separation of church and state. For these beliefs, they were widely persecuted and martyred by other Protestants and Roman Catholics.

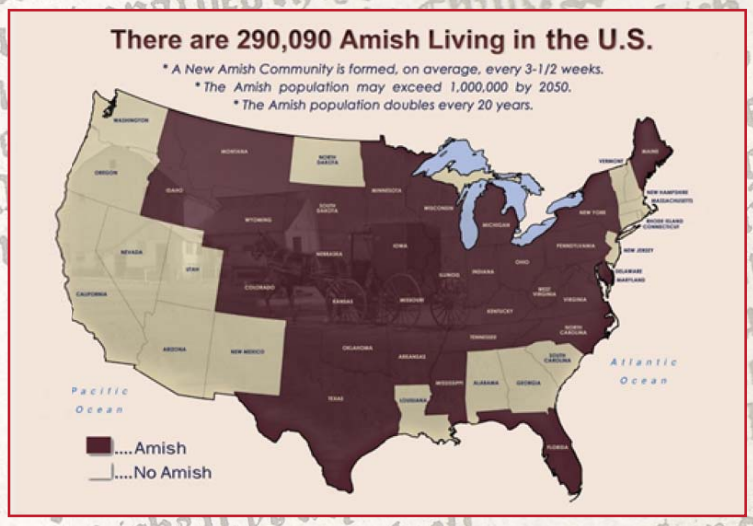
Amish communities in the United States have a rich history that began in Europe almost 500 years ago. In 1525, religious reformers in Switzerland, who later became known as Anabaptists, began rebaptizing adult believers. The Anabaptist movement spread quickly throughout Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands, even though the practice of rebaptization was outlawed and punishable by death.

Civil and church authorities felt threatened by the rapid spread of this movement, and began to persecute members of the new religious sect, even sending "Anabaptist hunters" out to capture those practicing the faith. By 1527, authorities killed the first Anabaptist martyr, and over the next few decades, over 2,500 Anabaptists died for their beliefs. *The Martyrs Mirror,* first published in 1660 and an important text in the Amish community, providesan account of these killings and subsequent martyrdom of the victims.

Many Anabaptists moved to rural areas or kept their beliefs secret in order to avoid persecution. The Mennonite derivation of the Anabaptists emerged in the mid-1500s, but the Amish name developed about 150 years later, when Jakob Amman became a leader in the Swiss Anabaptist church. In 1693, he worked to revitalize the Anabaptist movement, which led to a division between his followers (later known as the Amish), and other Anabaptist sects.

Amish families first arrived in America in two waves: one in the mid-1700s, and another in the mid-1800s. Many emigrated to seek religious freedom and to secure land for their future generations. Upon arrival in the United States, the earliest Amish settlers established homesteads in parts of Pennsylvania, and then later established communities in Ohio and Iowa. Since these early days, Amish communities have spread to 27 states, but over half of the Amish living in America still reside in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana.

Lancaster County, where Nickel Mines is located, is North America's oldest and most densely populated Amish settlement. Lancaster County has grown exponentially in its Amish population in the past century, with only 500 Amish living there in 1900, to about 27,000 today. Lancaster County is one of the fastest growing counties in Pennsylvania, largely due to the expanding Amish population, as well as the press of suburbanization from Philadelphia, 65 miles to the east.




**Amish Population in America**
**Image credit: Map Ministry**

### *Did you know?*

There are nearly four dozen Amish settlements in the state of Wisconsin, with an approximate population of over 17,000 as of 2014. We have the fourth largest Amish population in the country. Much of the Amish population in Wisconsin is concentrated in the west central part of the state.

**Beheading of 7 Brothers, from *Martyrs Mirror* (1529)**
**Image credit: Jan Luiken**

## AMISH RELIGION

Amish spirituality focuses on the New Testament, as well as the witness of the Anabaptist martyrs of the 16th century. Emphasis on the collective over the individual is key, as is forgiveness. There are no sacred symbols, church buildings, or formal religious education in the Amish church, and services are held in people's homes. The Amish believe in practicing their faith in everyday life through their behavior instead of by following doctrines or engaging in rigid religious rituals.

Amish clergy are not formally trained, must be male, are selected by drawing lots, and serve for life. Each district typically has four leaders, serving in three different roles: a bishop, two ministers, and a deacon. The bishop supervises two districts, but as a group, they supervise the religious life of the community and preside over church services. While the clergy must be male, women do have a vote and a voice in church meetings.

Amish adults choose to become official members of the church through baptism, often in their late teens to early twenties. Adult members will remain with the church for life; if they choose to leave the church, they will be subjected to excommunication or shunning. There are particular rules that govern the interactions between members and those who have been shunned, due to their breaking of their vow to remain true to the church. While these rules do not entirely restrict contact with the excommunicated, oftentimes, families choose to separate themselves to lessen some of the pain involved with coping with the former member's choices. Those who choose not to be baptized and stray from the community are still allowed to interact with friends and family without the stigma of shunning.

## AMISH SCHOOLING

For many years, Amish children went to school alongside their non-Amish peers, mostly in the rural one-room schoolhouses that were once common. Once communities began consolidating schools and bussing children, the Amish worried about the influences that their children might experience attending public school. By the 1950s, most Amish had stopped sending their children to high schools, and often public schools for the lower grades, as well. Over the next several decades, many parents were prosecuted and jailed for breaking compulsory schooling laws. In 1972, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* that forcing Amish children to attend high school was a violation of the right to freedom of religion.

In contemporary Amish communities, students attend school within their church districts. Thirty to thirty-five children from grades one through eight gather together each day in a one-room schoolhouse with one teacher. The teacher moves throughout the class in short sessions with each grade. Amish teachers are selected by the school directors, a group of fathers chosen by the community. Amish teachers are often the brightest young women in the community, and though they become teachers in their late teens or early twenties, many of them leave teaching when they marry. Teachers have no formal training, but teach students in eight grades reading, arithmetic, spelling and grammar, penmanship, history, and some geography.

## AMISH USE OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Popular culture often paints the Amish as a people who are backwards and rigid in their cultural customs and rejection of modern technology. In fact, because Amish communities and congregations do not share a centralized structured hierarchy, each Amish group sets its own norms and expectations for members, while still adhering to some basic Amish customs. Lancaster County, the setting of *The Amish Project*, is more progressive in connection to technology than some other Amish communities. Amish interaction with technology varies from community to community: each church district of 25 to 35 families sets its own *Ordnung* for its members. Some Amish use electricity to do business, some have indoor plumbing, and some use power tools. The *Ordnung* regulates these interactions with technology and, while the regulations resist change, church leaders take into consideration changes that may need to be made as time progresses.

**"By not having electricity, imagine all the aisles I don't have to walk down in a department store! Aisles of hair blowers, and dryers, and toasters, and all that. Hey! I don't have to walk down that, that's liberation! I don't have to make many decisions, the community has made the decisions. To me, that's liberation."**

– Amish man interviewed for *The American Experience*, "The Amish"

## AMISH BUSINESSES

The majority of Amish were once farmers, but the quintessential images of Amish farm life are becoming less and less the norm as time progresses. Now less than fifty percent of Amish people make a living in agricultural pursuits. Availability of farmland is shrinking as suburbanization and more corporate farming take over. In response, Amish families have had to turn to other means of income.

Many Amish communities and families have resorted to various cottage industries that fall in three categories: home-based businesses, small manufacturing operations, and mobile work crews. Home-based businesses range from bakeshops to hardware stores to greenhouses, and are numerous throughout Amish communities and the surrounding towns. The small manufacturing industries often make farm machinery, furniture, or cabinetry. Mobile workers often do construction work throughout the area, or work at farmer's markets. These small Amish businesses have a large rate of success, with only five percent of new businesses failing. Even with many opportunities for work within the Amish community, some Amish men still must resort to working in non-Amish factories as the availability of jobs does not meet the demand.

Amish men use horses to pull harvesting machinery
Photo credit: Daniel Rodriguez / PBS

**"Products and practices that might undermine community life, such as cars, cameras, television, computers, or attending high school are deemed worldly. Some new products, such as in-line skates and battery powered hand tools, are not stigmatized with this label; only those that threaten community values are forbidden."**

– *The Amish of Lancaster County* by Donald Kraybill

Amish men at an auction
Photo credit: Daniel Rodriguez / PBS

A grandmother, mother, and two children ride in an open horse-drawn carriage
Photo credit: Daniel Rodriguez / PBS

## AMISH INTERACTION WITH THE NON-AMISH WORLD

The Amish do not live in secluded enclaves separate from their communities; indeed, Amish people interact with non-Amish on a regular basis through business and other dealings. While the Amish do not want the outside world's influence to change their ways or their values, interacting with the non-Amish world is often a necessity. Amish in places like Lancaster County live and work closely with the non-Amish and share friendship and neighborly connections.

In fact, while the Amish were once persecuted for their ways, they are now admired by many non-Amish. This admiration, and perhaps fascination with those who are different, has led to a huge tourism industry centered on Amish life. In Lancaster County, the setting of *The Amish Project*, over 8.3 million tourists visit annually, many to get a glimpse into the world of the Amish. Tourists, though perceived as intrusive by some Amish, provide economic benefits. Many Amish operate roadside stands or shops that tourists patronize, but the Amish shopkeepers make sure to maintain these businesses on their own terms.

Amish interactions with the outside world do pose some threats to the Amish way of life, but the regulation of these boundaries is continually developing and changing as time goes on. Whether it is tourists or newspeople recording images of Amish adults, young Amish questioning the teachings of the church, or civic authorities putting the Amish on trial for defying building codes, the Amish are constantly negotiating the balance between necessities of interaction versus infringement on their way of life.

## *Interview with* ***The Amish Project*** **Director Leda Hoffmann** *and* **Actor Deborah Staples**

**Leda, how does directing a one-woman show compare to directing a full-cast production?**

*Leda Hoffmann:* I really like working in a way that allows the actors to originate ideas. It means that we are structuring our rehearsals and we are structuring a lot of ideas in this play around what feels right for this specific person. It is nice to just get to focus on this singular actor-director relationship in the room, and figure out together how this play works. With stage managers, a dialect coach, and artistic interns, we are a pretty-tight knit team of people working on this story together, which means that everyone's piece in it is really important.

**Deb, what was the collaborative process like with Leda, and other designers and crew members present during the process?**

*Deborah Staples:* It is just an incredible partnership. Leda has set a room that is collaborative and open. She leads with tremendous intelligence and generosity. We are looking for, first of all, identifying what the questions are, and then finding what the answers are. We keep circling around like that. Somebody once said, working with a director on a one-person show, is it kind of like the jockey and the horse? I think that is a pretty good metaphor for what it is. You need both working at the top of their form and working incredibly well together, or you cannot get anywhere.

**Who is the jockey and who is the horse?**

*DS:* I am the horse. I bring a lot to the table with questions and things that I throw out there and try. Instinct. This feels right and this does not feel right. Trying different things. But she is the one who has the overall view. I cannot see what it looks like. We have slightly different information. She is making strategic choices.

**How did you approach the idea of one actor as multiple characters?**

*LH:* The fact that this is a one-person but multi-character play means that one of the first questions I asked was, "Why is it one person?" This is a play where all of the characters need to be centered in this one person. Everyone has this really human connection to the other people because they are all embodied by one performer. Instead of trying to build a show where it seems as if there are lots of different performers, we are looking at this deliberately being one person, the way that all those characters can come together and be united, even though they are different, in this one person.

*DS:* We have been trying to create very clear distinctions between the characters because I look the same the whole time, so it is just how is my posture slightly different, how is my voice or my speech slightly different without making it obvious or a cartoon character. We do not want caricatures; we want to see a broad spectrum of humanity. Keeping it very real and just seeing how subtle we can make the changes and still have everybody with us through all the different changes, because all the different characters keep coming back; they interrupt each other. Sometimes they will talk for two pages and sometimes they will only say two words before another character takes over.

**Working on full cast productions, you have other cast members to respond to and support you. Deb, how has that changed doing a one-woman show?**

*DS:* The audience is my scene partner. Just like if you have a story that is something personal or funny, you think about the difference in you when you are saying it to your best friend. You play to their sensibilities; they understand it in a certain way. So, the difference between saying it to your best friend and telling your mother. Whole different ball game. I find that with people coming in the room because of what I can read on their face or what I happen to know about them personally. I know they are going to hear my words differently and so I hear my words differently. The people that come in the room teach me something new about what I am saying.

**How does *The Amish Project* fit into the theatrical mission Milwaukee Rep has been pursuing?**

*LH:* Mark [Clements, Artistic Director,] is always talking about the need for redemptive stories, and the need for stories that take us into real issues that deserve our conversation and our time. *The Amish Project* fits into that really well in that it is a look at some big ideas about the world. It is a fictional look into an event from 2006. We go through incredibly hard moments in this play, but it is a story that has me leaving rehearsal feeling as if the world is a better place than I did before watching the play. It has this incredibly redemptive core. As we [the Artistic staff] look for plays to fit into the Stiemke Studio, we are interested in plays that can make great use of the intimacy of that space. People who come to see *The Amish Project* are going to get to see the Stiemke in a new seating configuration. We are getting audiences closer to the actor, and making use of what that space has to offer.

**When you were building the physical world of the show, what kind of aesthetic or design ideas did you have in mind?**

*LH:* The great thing about this play is how open it is to interpretation. We are not trying to land a bunch of realistic locations; we need a space that lets the whole

## *FEATURED ARTIST:* **JIM MEDVED** *CHARGE SCENIC ARTIST*

Jim Medved, Charge Scenic Artist at Milwaukee Rep, refers to himself as the Art Police. Clarifying, he says, "I monitor the designer's aesthetic in terms of our quality standard being up to their quality standard." As Charge Scenic Artist/Art Police, Medved's work is highly collaborative, both with Lead Scenic Artist, Shannon Mann, and Scenic Artist Kira Nehmer, and with the other production and scene shop team members. For every show, his work starts when the scenic designer provides him with drawings (a 2-D representation), a model (a 3-D representation), or painter's elevations (what they want the design elements to look like in scale). Jim and his team then turn these ideas into reality. Medved says, "The first question I always ask the designer is, 'If I paint it like this, will you be happy?' If they say yes, we can go with what they have given us. If they say no, then we have to open a conversation about what this elevation communicates to us. Is it a color reference? A texture reference? Is it this color but more muted? There is a lot of real interpersonal communication with the designer to try to get from them as much information as we need to do our job."

Medved received his BS in Secondary Education with emphasis in Theater and Industrial Arts, and his MFA in Scene Design and Scene Painting, from South Illinois University at Carbondale. He bounced around the country working for various theater companies in Utah, New Jersey, and Texas before arriving at Milwaukee Rep in 1997. He cites his first show as Charge Scenic Artist, *Work Song*, as his "emotional favorite", though "the last show we worked on should be my

story be told. Different designers on this production have talked about the claustrophobia of the play, and also the openness of the play. When the whole world opens up, we have the space to do that, but we can also go right down into this small schoolhouse when the story is sharply focused.

*DS:* All of the characters have their own locations where they are speaking from. Some of them cross over. As long as I know where I am and whom I am talking to and why, you come along. There are enough clues in the text. The thing that really makes a lot of the play clear is the different way in which each character relates to the audience. You can tell just by looking at the way I am looking at you in the audience that I need something slightly different from you, that it is a different energy. I think each person is in the place where it makes sense. It just glides over location.

***The Amish Project* is a fictional interpretation of a real event. In what ways is this particular interpretation of the event relevant to our audiences at Milwaukee Rep?**

*DS:* Because ultimately the story was not about a school shooting. The story was about forgiveness and compassion in the face of horrific tragedy. Forgiveness is a tricky thing. It is hard. It is something that if anybody is honest, most people would say they struggle with it. To watch a people whose whole philosophy is that we forgive and we forgive instantly, is shocking. But then all of a sudden you say, wow, so what if when this horrible thing happened in the world, the larger community responded with love and compassion? That is a really interesting idea, to see how that shifts things down the timeline.

*LH:* The Amish act of forgiveness really surprised people, and made a lot of people in our country ask a lot of big questions, including Jessica Dickey, who then wrote the play. The idea that the Amish could forgive the gunman, publically, and ensure that donations coming to the victims were also going to the gunman's widow and her children—that act really stood out to people. What Dickey is doing in this play is investigating the different ways people can respond to tragedy. By making it fictional, she has allowed us to open that world up. We imagine all of these different people who live in Nickel Mines, and what their responses could be, but we are not trying to be honest to specific people and their specific experiences. By allowing the play to be fictional, we allow it to ask broader questions about the nature of forgiveness and our own individual capacities for forgiveness.

**Leda, you started out as an intern at Milwaukee Rep, then worked in the Rep Education Department, currently serve as Rep Literary Coordinator, and are now directing a show at here. How does it feel to have grown in the theater this way?**

*LH:* It is incredible to be directing a show at the theater where you started as an intern. Milwaukee Rep has become an artistic home for me. While this is my first main stage Milwaukee Rep show, the questions that Milwaukee Rep is asking and our goals as a theater are something I understand from a lot of different perspectives. It is wonderful to be aware of the kind of people who come see our plays, what people want to see, and the questions audiences and the people who work in theater in Milwaukee have about the way we tell stories. I hope that some people will be surprised about the way we get to tell this particular story. Getting to know the staff of Milwaukee Rep, and having these long term relationships, getting to work with them on a main stage show like this, I can shape the show around their strengths, and you know you are supported by a wonderful team.

**Deb, you played Veta in *Harvey* earlier this season and are now in *The Amish Project*, two very different shows. What has it been like working with Milwaukee Rep as an Associate Artist, and what draws you to this theater in particular?**

*DS:* I always wanted to be part of a company. One of the things I worked really hard to get good at was being versatile. There is a certain temptation if you live in a big market to be known as somebody who does one particular thing really well. Whenever somebody has that kind of a role, let us call so-and-so. You end up getting to do what you do. When you work in a company where people are going to see you over the course of a season, over the course of years, you just always want to be surprising them. You always want to have something different. You do not want to feel as if it is essentially the same character just in different circumstances; you want to see how different you can be. That has been incredibly rewarding, to really explore that to terrific lengths.

**What should audiences know before attending this show?**

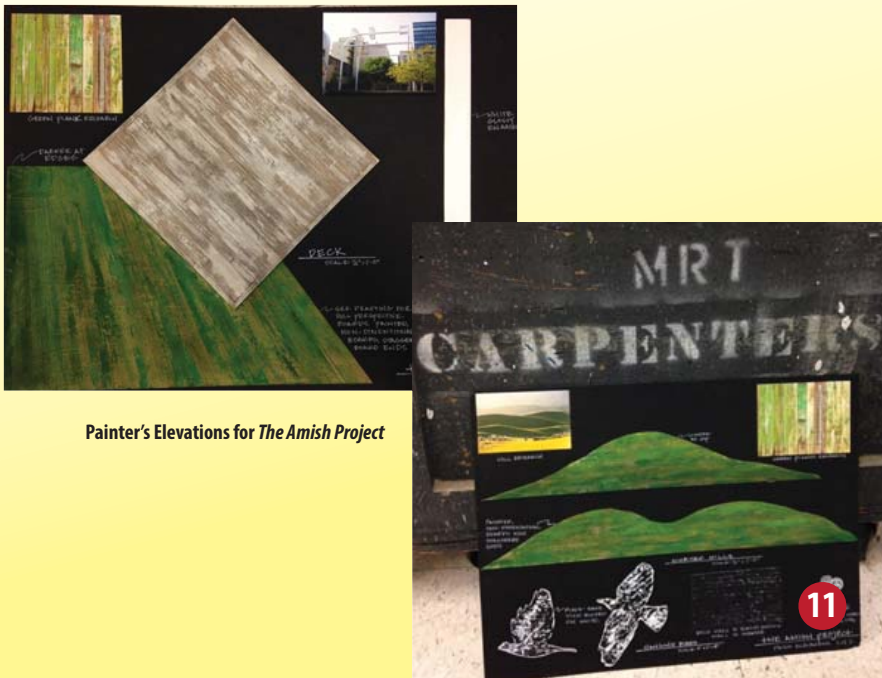
*DS:* Not to worry. Be open and trust yourself. Trust me that I will take you on this journey. I know that not everybody is used to going to the theater and watching somebody turn their head and suddenly they are a different person talking. I know that if somebody is very new to it, they might get concerned that they are not following it. I would like them to know that I am playing at least seven different people. Those people we will see over and over again. And just trust that you will get everything that you will need to get. Trust both of us.

*LH:* Come hear our story! No one needs to be an expert on anything to watch this play. It is going to land with different people in really different ways. I hope that there is a breadth of audience experience with this play. It is open enough that you get to ask the questions that you need to ask in it. We will guide you through this story, but there are lots of different things to hang onto, characters to witness. Just come and let Deb take you through this story.

favorite show. I have to have that strong of an attachment to the project while it is our responsibility."

The responsibility on their team is heavy. As one of the last people to touch a show before the scenery is loaded in to the theater, and with multiple shows being put together at the same time, they are often up against quite a crunch. "I call it the Time-Space Continuum," says Medved. "We have to fill the space, and whatever is filling the space can only be there for a certain amount of time because usually there is another show or another element of scenery for that show that still has to be worked on."

They had eight working days to complete all of their tasks for *The Amish Project*. Despite this, Medved trusts wholly in the talent of his team, citing them as artists who take "ownership over their art and go out on a ledge and try." The painter's elevations they had for the show gave them a great model with which to work. Unlike many draftings which nowadays are done on a computer, these were mostly hand-painted. "Something hand-painted has emotion to it," Medved says. Regarding *The Amish Project* design, Medved says, "It is a very beautiful design. It is very simple, but it is very elegant."




**Painter's Elevations for *The Amish Project***

# VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center, downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. The entrance to the Stiemke Studio is located behind the large rotunda staircase.

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- Educate over 20,000 students at 200+ schools in the greater Milwaukee area with Rep Immersion Day experiences, student matinees, workshops, tours, and by making connections with their school curriculum through classroom teaching programs such as Reading Residencies and Scriptworks;
- Maintain our commitment to audiences with special needs through our Access Services that include American Sign Language interpreted productions, captioned theater, infrared listening systems, and script synopses to ensure that theater at The Rep is accessible to all;
- And educate the next generation of theater professionals with our Artistic Internship Program which gives emerging professional artists a chance to hone their skills at The Rep as they begin to pursue their theatrical careers.

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