

Green Light reviving The Amish Project

Waterloo Region Record · 15 Apr 2017 · Martin De Groot Martin de Groot writes about local arts and culture each Saturday. You can reach him by email at mdg131@gmail.com.

When Green Light Arts presented the Canadian première of Jessica Dickey’s “The Amish Project” in the fall of 2014, they were new in town. This was their first fullfledged production, and it drew great critical acclaim: The Record’s Valerie Hill described Amy Keating’s performance in this one-woman, multiple character play as “agonizingly good” and “simply mesmerizing.”



Since then, the company, led by managing director Carin Lowerison and artistic producer Matt White, has gone far in achieving the expressed goal of being “recognized as an essential contributor to the theatre and arts community of Waterloo Region.”

Now, they’re remounting “The Amish Project” starring Amy Keating to make it available to a wider audience. There are two more performances remaining in the play’s current run at The Registry Theatre in Kitchener, tonight and tomorrow afternoon.

The Easter weekend timing was of necessity: It was the only opening on The Registry’s heavily booked schedule. But it suits the occasion: An “imagined recreation” of the tragic 2006 Amish schoolhouse shooting in Nickel Mines, Penn., “The Amish Project” is about compassion and forgiveness.

The Sunday matinée in particular is being offered as “a moving arts and culture event that family members can experience together during their observance of Easter.” They’re even providing on-site child care at no additional cost for children under 12 years of age, and offering half-price tickets to families who do Easter brunch at the Crowne Plaza Kitchener-Waterloo hotel.

If you can’t make “The Amish Project” part of your Easter celebrations, there will be opportunities to experience it in two additional locations: four shows at the Staircase Theatre in Hamilton, April 20 to 23; and five performances at the St. Jacobs Schoolhouse Theatre, April 26 to 30.

Taking the show to St. Jacobs is in keeping with a Green Light Arts goal to have a presence in all parts of the region. The Schoolhouse Theatre performances will be the most intimate: They’ll be staged in the round, “to emphasize the human connection between Amy and the audience.”

The decision to take the production to Hamilton sets an intriguing precedent. According to the promotional material, the hope is that this can be the beginning of a kind of “arts pipeline” through which “works developed in Hamilton would have presentations in Waterloo Region and vice versa.”

I’d been seeing references to a “Hamilton-Waterloo Region Arts Corridor,” and wondered if this was part of it. From a cultural development perspective, this combination makes more sense than the oft-cited Toronto-Waterloo “Innovation Corridor.” There’s better balance, and therefore greater potential for mutually beneficial reciprocity.

When I spoke with Matt White this week, he explained that the original intent had been to include Cambridge in the tour, but that couldn’t be arranged this time around.

Interestingly, his Toronto connections were what led him to the arrangement with Hamilton. Although Matt White grew up here, and came to know Waterloo Region through a three-year stint with Theatre & Company in Kitchener, he and his partner both studied theatre and began their careers in the metropolis.

Hamilton, of course, has had two-way, all-day GO connections with Toronto for decades. The arts scene there has been flourishing of late, augmented by droves of artists who have moved there fleeing the ever-rising cost of housing and work space in Toronto.

For the current tour, the initial contact was with people that White and Lowerison knew from the theatre scene in Toronto, who have made the move to Hamilton. From that point on, they found Hamilton community so welcoming and supportive that the idea of doing something reciprocal seemed almost obligatory.