

# The Amish Project agonizingly good

Keating's one-woman show gripping tale of girls' deaths

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WATERLOO — In the emotionally gruelling multiple roles demanded by “The Amish Project,” Amy Keating is simply mesmerizing.



The one-woman play is based on the true story of Oct. 2, 2006, when milkman Charles Roberts walked into an Old Order Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania, took 10 girls hostage and murdered five before turning the gun on himself, leaving behind his own shocked family and a community both outraged and in deep mourning.

Their story is told through the eyes of half a dozen fictitious characters.

In a post-play question-and-answer period, Keating admitted she knew very little about the story, except for a few faint memories from news features.

She was also unaware of the play or the American playwright, Jessica Dickey, but this proved to be an advantage.

Keating was able to start from scratch, to channel her own ideas and bring each of the characters to life. This she does exceptionally well.

Within a few minutes, Keating has the audience's rapt attention, as she switches from one character to the next, from one of the murdered Amish girls, to a history professor who speaks to the community on behalf of the Amish, to a farm woman who blames the murderer's wife for the carnage: If only she'd been a better wife this would not have happened.

Each character provides a unique viewpoint and the actor's ability to switch from one character to the next is gripping without ever getting maudlin.

Most integral to the story is the humanity of each character, even the killer, Roberts, who had been a married man, a caring father of two little boys.

The play does not try to provide any answers and even as the Amish community vows to forgive the killer, there is no judgment passed as to whether this is truly possible.

How could anyone truly forgive such a horrendous act?

The Amish Project, directed by Matt White, is a Canadian premier and the inaugural production for a new theatre company, Green Light Arts, in cooperation with the University of Waterloo's drama department.

A small company, Green Light is using a studio space at the University of Waterloo's Humanities Theatre, a space that allows for a unique level of intimacy with the actor and the story.