



KANATA THEATRE

PRESENTS

QUIET IN THE LAND



A Gentle Canadian Drama by Anne Chislett

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A Gentle Canadian Drama by Anne Chislett

Play's quiet power shines in Kanata production

By Barbara Crook

Staff and Arts

Anne Chislett's *Quiet in the Land* is one of those beautifully written yet daunting plays that doesn't allow actors to flourish the option of killing themselves behind an action-packed plot, stagey conflicts or flashy production effects.

The success depends on the ability of the performers to understand subtle and complex relationships and make the audience care for the characters.

For those who are willing to make the effort and experience the delicate touch this play requires, the results can be very rewarding.

They certainly are in the Kanata Theatre production of Chislett's Governor General's Award-winning play, which opened Wednesday at the East of March High School.

Director Margaret Jardine's obvious love of the play and its characters has resulted in a sensitive and intelligent production that captures the audience's attention and emotions.

Set in a farming community near Kitchener in 1917-18, the play examines a religion and a set of traditions in transition.

Younger members of the community question their elders' insistence on adhering to English in favour of German, staying away from all modern conveniences, and avoiding newspapers and reading material.

The conflict between the young and the old and between progress and tradition comes to a head when one of the young men decides to make his own choices and runs away to become a soldier.

The production is well-paced and well-paced. Among the standout actors are Darren Bess as the main character, John Henry Bess, and Karen Westmore as his sweetheart and Gwendolyn Valley as her mother who bickers often with the men and women's hats and the delicate starched women's head coverings. Keith Huxley has captured himself, representing the complicated, hardworking and rhythmic of Amish music.

Philip Ogden's set makes the multiple playing areas, but we could do with a few new spring newspapers and reading material, which now down the play.

Theatre review

Quiet in the Land
Kanata Theatre
East of March High School
1 The Parkway, Kanata
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From hats to music, Kanata troupe makes Amish play authentic

By Barbara Crook

When place matters research to the director, finding out about a particular time is the first thing to do. In the case of *Quiet in the Land*, which opens Wednesday at the East of March High School, director Margaret Jardine and a group of Kanata Theatre members have been particularly diligent about researching their production of Amish life. The play is set in the 1910s, which was a time of great change in the lives of Amish people.

And they were lucky enough to find two Amish communities in the Kanata area. Jardine and her troupe have been able to visit these communities and see how the Amish live. They have seen the Amish people in their homes, in their churches, and in their fields. They have seen the Amish people in their daily lives, and they have seen the Amish people in their special occasions.



Stewart Atkinson with Darren Bess and Karen Westmore rehearsal

about it is there.

The Amish are an order of Christians, a religious and cultural group that first arrived in Canada about 180 years ago. Some members of the group are very strict in their beliefs and all modern conveniences — including electricity, automobiles, telephones and steel machinery — and so encourage their members to stick to traditional rural modes of life.

But in a southern Ontario Amish community in 1917, Chislett's play deals with the concerns and difficulties of a group of Amish families in the face of conservatism. When one member of the community breaks with the painful beliefs of the Amish and goes off to fight in the war, his relationship with his friends and family can never be the same.

Preparing for the production has been a major effort for the troupe. After extensive research into Amish and Mennonite culture, the troupe was able to create a production that is both authentic and powerful. The troupe has been able to create a production that is both authentic and powerful.

Williams went to a museum in Kitchener-Waterloo to research the costumes. She was able to design and make authentic costumes, including bonnets, aprons, and dresses. She was able to create a production that is both authentic and powerful.

I just hope I'm doing the play justice because it is such a quiet play. Chislett deals with the problems of minority groups in society and the role of the older and younger generations. I've been reading and studying it for months, and I get something new from it every time I go through it.

Quiet in the Land subject of careful research

by Sally and Keith Hanes

Have you noticed an increase in the number of bearded men in Kanata recently? It's true, but not for protection against cold winds. Kanata Theatre is performing Anne Chabert's play *Quiet in the Land* next month, and the beards being grown by certain cast members are typical of the attention to detail and authenticity that this play deserves, and a getting from cold and production team alike.

The play is set in an Ontario Amish community in 1917. The Amish are a division of the Mennonites, a strict and conservative Christian sect formalized by Menno Simons in Germany in 1536. The Amish drew away from the Mennonites in 1693 and have maintained their "old order" traditions ever since.

There have been several waves of Amish immigration into Canada, with many coming from Europe in the 18th and early 20th centuries, and more recent groups coming from the United States. The lifestyle and religious pattern of the Amish is closely related to that of the 17th century. *Quiet in the Land* is a sensitive and dramatic exploration of the Amish way of life.

Since last April when the Kanata Theatre chose Margaret Jachnie to be the director for the play, she has been busy finding out about the traditions, spirit, and disciplines of the Amish people. From the Ottawa and Kanata libraries she has learned the history of the Amish in Canada, particularly the difficulties presented to them by concep-

tion during the First World War, a main theme in the play. But one cannot get close to people through books.

Lufon and Dewi Williams, doing costume research for the play, visited The Meeting Place, an Amish information centre in



St. Jacobs, Ontario, where the rules, customs, styles, traditions and typical clothing are explained. Lufon learned that clothes are made by each mother for her own family, and that each dress, apron, or head covering is always from the same pattern. Clothing for a given community is always very similar. Lufon set about buying bolts of cloth suitable in color and texture for the play, and now has about a dozen Kanata Theatre ladies sewing Amish clothes.

Marvin Ross, who plays the part of Christie in the play, personally discovered more details about proper Amish dress. He was on a business trip in up-state New York some months ago, and while travelling along the back roads saw a horse and buggy that was apparently Amish. Marvin was able to con-

verse with the driver, who was interested in the Kanata play, and gave Marvin the name of the people in his community who made the head coverings for the women, and who sold the men's hats. Later, Marvin and Margaret returned to Hamilton to meet the Amish couple, and so arranged for proper headwear for the play.

The "coverings" themselves consist of two parts: a white starched and pleated muslin covering which fits closely over most of the head, (worn at all times), and a black and rather rigid bonnet, worn only out of doors. When the coverings were completed last month, Margaret was pleased to find that they were of a lighter weight material than is normal for winter, so that they would be more suitable for indoor wear on stage.

It is interesting that the quiet Amish woman who made head coverings needed to ask her husband's permission before she would agree to make them for the play. Through these contacts, discoveries on both sides were made. It turns out that Margaret was as fascinating to the Amish as they are to her.

One of the scenes in *Quiet in the Land* involves "apple schnitzing," and when Margaret gently asked, they were delighted to tell her all about it. Schnitzing is a major social occasion for the community, as well as a group effort to peel, slice, and prepare apples to be dried for preservation. The Amish must depend on their own effort rather than electricity for these things. The

social side of schnitzing includes certain courtship traditions, but to go into detail here might detract from the play.

Like other aspects of Amish

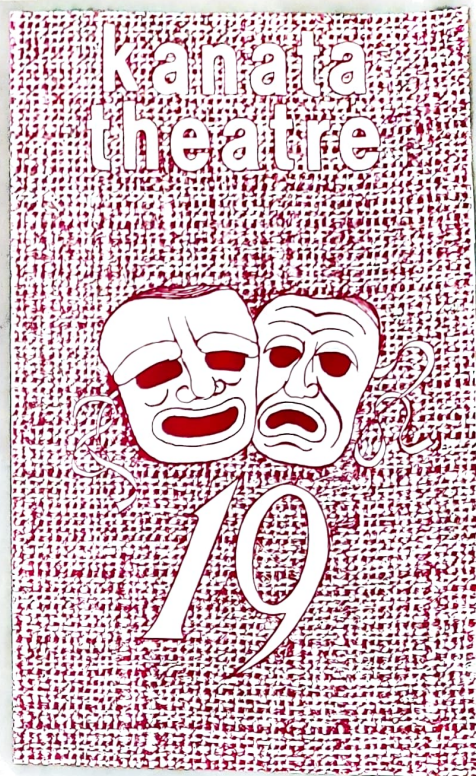
life, their music is rooted in the 17th century, although very little is known about it by outsiders.

see *Amish*, p. 7

Amish, cont'd from p. 5

In their gatherings, the Amish may use the Aushund, a book with the words (in High German, of course) or traditional hymns, but the music itself has been handed on only by oral tradition for centuries. It is plainsong, with no harmony used whatsoever. Over the years, small changes and colorations inevitably have crept in so that the music sung in one community today will differ from that in almost any other. Everyone joins in, led by a singing "vorsinger," and the "sings," too, are social occasions for the community. What does it sound like? Sort of a middle Eastern sounding Gregorian chant in German.

There is no hymn that was carefully recorded by a musicologist in Ohio in 1943, a copy of which was kindly made available to Kanata Theatre (Ottawa) by Marlene Werle. The five hymns that were used in the original production of the play in 1983 have been copied by car onto manuscript by S. Moore. Keith Raney, who is the Vorsinger in the play, has modified the manuscripts to have the musical flavor of the recorded hymn to simulate authenticity. The Amish music in *Quiet in the Land* is strange to modern ears, and helps to set a special mood for the play, and important events in it.



Cast members go through their paces in preparation for *Quiet in the Land*, Kanata Theatre's latest production of the season. The Canadian drama begins tonight and runs until Saturday at the Earl of March auditorium. photo by Rob Meinyk



Play's quiet power shines in Kanata production

By Barbara Crook

Citizen staff writer

Anne Chislett's *Quiet in the Land* is one of those beautifully-written yet daunting plays that doesn't allow actors or director the option of hiding deficiencies behind an action-packed plot, stagey conflicts or flashy production effects.

Its success depends on the ability of the performers to understand subtle and complex relationships and make the audience care for the characters.

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Set in a farming community near Kitchener in 1917-18, the play examines a religion and a set of traditions in transition.

Younger members of the community question their elders' insistence on eschewing English in favor of German, staying away from all modern conveniences, ignoring newspapers and avoiding outsiders.

The conflict between the young

Theatre review

Quiet in the Land

Kanata Theatre

Earl of March High School

4 The Parkway, Kanata

March 2-5, 8 p.m.

and the old and between progress and tradition come to a head when one of the young men decides to make his own choices, and runs away to become a soldier.

The production is well-acted and well-paced. Among the stand-outs are Doreen Boss as the matriarch of one family, Stuart Wheeler as her rebellious grandson, Karen Westmore as his sweetheart and Gwendy Tolley as her mother, who hankers after such instruments of the Devil as telephones and pianos.

The tiniest details of props and costumes have been handled by Eufron Williams, Elsie Bryant, Joan McLaughlin and Rosemary Scott — with some help from members of an Amish community in Heuvelton, N.Y., who provided the men's and women's hats and the delicate starched women's head coverings. Keith Raney has outdone himself replicating the complicated harmonies and rhythms of Amish music.

Philip Copple's set enables relatively smooth transitions within the multiple playing areas. But we could do with a few less blackouts and fussy movements of furniture, which slow down the play.

From hats to music, Kanata troupe makes Amish play authentic

By Barbara Crook

Citizen staff writer

Most plays require research by the director — finding out about a particular time in history, reading up on a certain style of theatre or deciding which piece of music best fits the period and setting.

Director Margaret Jardine and a group of Kanata Theatre volunteers have been particularly diligent about researching their production of Anne Chislett's *Quiet in the Land*, which opens Wednesday at the Earl of March High School.

Not only have they read extensively about the Amish community in which Chislett's play is set, but they've made several trips to Amish communities in Kitchener-Waterloo and New York State to get a first-hand view of the quiet and simple way of life of the Amish.

And they were lucky enough to find two Amish seamstresses to make the men's hats and intricate women's headresses and bonnets for the Kanata production.

"I've really enjoyed the research part of this play," says Jardine, who has worked on many Kanata productions but is directing one of the amateur group's mainstage shows for the first time.

"I've enjoyed indulging myself and finding out all about the Amish. And the play itself is so good on so many levels. People can certainly come and be entertained by the play, but if you want something to think

about, it is there."

The Amish are an order of Mennonites, a religious and cultural group that first arrived in Canada about 200 years ago. Some orders of the religion eschew modern forms of dress and all modern conveniences — including electricity, automobiles, telephones and most machinery — and encourage their members to stick to traditional rural modes of life.

Set in a southern Ontario Amish community in 1917, Chislett's play deals with the concerns and difficulties of a group of Amish families in the face of conscription. When one member of the community breaks with the pacifist beliefs of the Amish and goes off to fight in the war, his relationship with his friends and family can never be the same.

Preparing for the production has been a major effort for the

theatre group. After extensive research into Amish and Mennonite music at the National Library, music director Keith Raney was able to write new arrangements of the original musical score.

He's been holding half-hour singing sessions before every regular rehearsal, getting the cast used to the unusual sounds and rhythms of the chanting music.

Costume designer Eufron

Williams went to a museum in Kitchener-Waterloo to research the costumes. She was able to design and make authentic collarless shirts, jackets and pants for the men, and dresses, shawls and aprons for the women, but she couldn't find a source for the men's and women's hats.

Fortunately, actor Marvin Boss came to the rescue. On a business trip near Ogdensburg, N.Y., he spotted some Amish in

a horse and buggy, followed them and asked if they knew a place to get hats. They gave him the name of a woman who could help.

Jardine accompanied Boss on his next trip there. They were able to order men's hats from the first woman, and women's bonnets and starched, pleated and faggotted head coverings from a second seamstress.

"I daren't let them rehearse with the coverings, because they'll go limp if they're used too often," says Jardine.

"The bonnets are wonderful. The only problem is that they are winter bonnets, so they are very heavy, and the sides are deep. It's sometimes difficult for the actresses to hear each other, and for their faces to be seen."

Jardine says the play is a challenge for a director, particularly since all the action takes place in two kitchens, with actors moving back and forth between them within a single scene. But she says she's been helped in her work by the fact that the cast loves the play as much as she does.

"I just hope I'm doing the play justice, because it is such a super play. Chislett deals with so many issues, including the problems of minority groups in society and the relationship of the older and younger generations. I've been reading and studying it for months, and I get something more from it every time I go through it."



— John Major, Citizen

Stewart Wheeler, left, Doreen Boss and Karen Westmore rehearse

Quiet in the Land subject of careful research

by Sally and Keith Raney

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