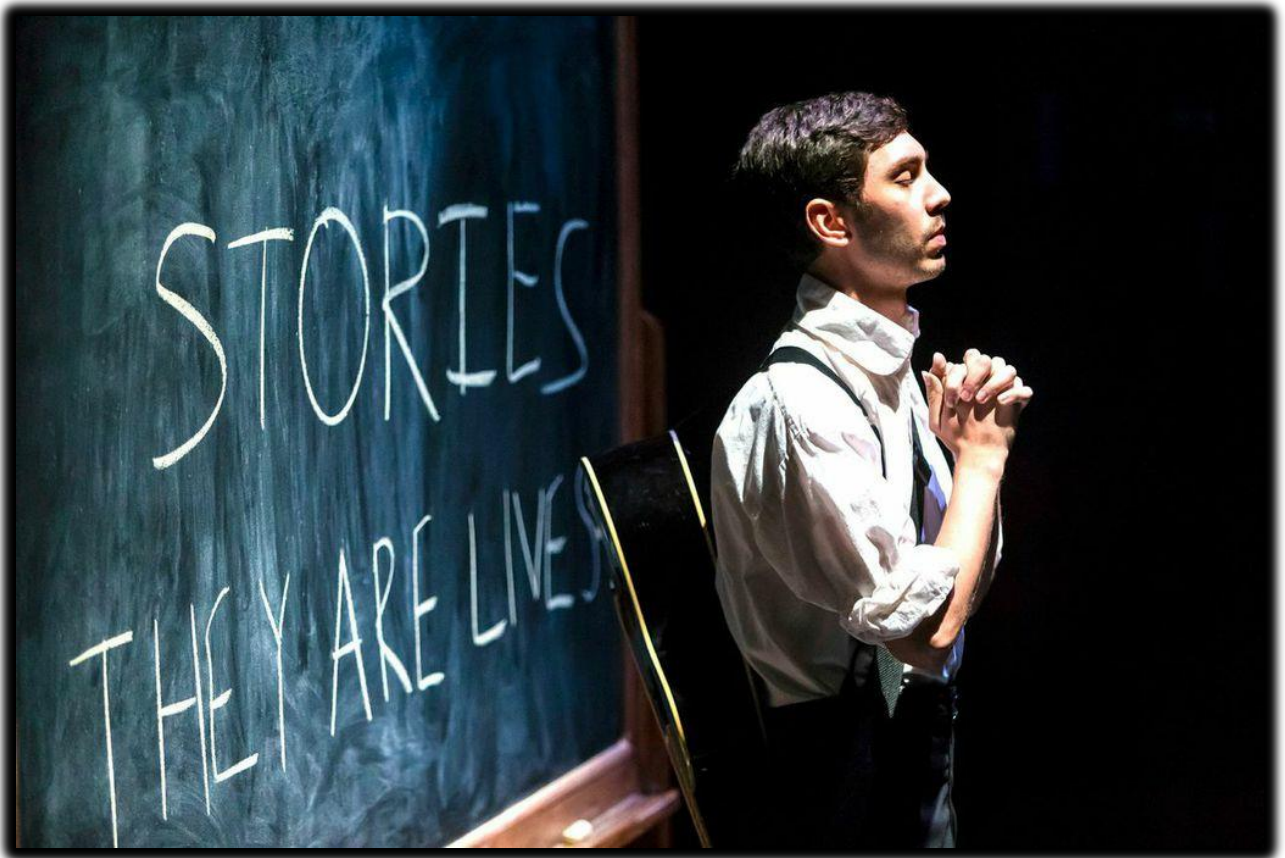


*"Extraordinary...tragedy turned into art, and the power of grace
as it may never have been shown before." - StageSceneLA*

NICKEL MINES

An unthinkable act. An uncommon forgiveness.



**MUSIC AND LYRICS
DAN DYER**

**BOOK
SHANNON STOEKE / ANDREW PALERMO**

**CREATOR/DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER
ANDREW PALERMO**

EXPLORING THE ALCHEMY OF FORGIVENESS...

Nickel Mines is a non-traditional musical combining spoken dialogue with interpretive movement and a powerful original score by composer Dan Dyer. Built on the assertion that history offers us more relevant drama than fiction, the book (co-written by Andrew Palermo and Shannon Stoeke) prioritizes allegiance to the facts of the case, utilizing transcripts of the crime and its aftermath and allowing the story to emerge through dramatic interpretation. The shooting is presented in vignette form through various perspectives, sometimes finding voice in a universal narrator. At its core, *Nickel Mines* is an exploration of the power of forgiveness, and the ways in which choosing forgiveness over retribution mitigates the sensationalism and cyclical escalation born of revenge. It is also an examination of the stories of lives spoken in their own words, a rethinking of the notion of victimhood, and a survey of the public's preconceptions about Amish religion and culture.

Nickel Mines is based on the 2006 West Nickel Mines School shooting that occurred in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Creator/Director/Choreographer Andrew Palermo chose his subject matter as a theatrical lens through which to explore individual and societal reactions to the event, and to let the facts of this historical moment in time speak for themselves through creative reenactment. Through community and audience engagement, *Nickel Mines* endeavors to assist in opening and furthering a thoughtful and productive dialogue on an issue that clearly continues to touch us all.

Palermo says the piece aims to “look at the events of that fateful October morning through a variety of lenses while making no judgments, professing no morals. The victims, the family of the killer, and the community all have a voice in this new theatrical work.

“Utilizing both historical and interpretive text, music and movement, *Nickel Mines* shines a light on this recent tragedy, and in the process, hopes to continue a dialogue on how violence, faith, forgiveness and justice speak to and interact with one another.”

Nickel Mines finds a powerful voice that walks the line between the ephemeral and the documentary, artfully giving life to a moment in history that continues to resonate on an increasingly frequent basis.

THE CREATORS



Andrew Palermo

(Co-Author/Director/Choreographer)

Direction and/or Choreography highlights: *Allegiance* (Broadway, November 2015, The Old Globe), *The Other Josh Cohen* (Papermill, SoHo Playhouse), *Kristin Chenoweth/Carnegie Hall*, *The Frank Loesser Songbook/New York Philharmonic* (Lincoln Center), *The Mikado* (Carnegie Hall), *Ace* (The Old Globe, Cincinnati Playhouse, Repertory Theater of St. Louis), *Miss Julie* (Geffen Playhouse),

Lyrics and Lyricists (92nd St. Y), *Bright Lights*, *Big City* (Prince Music Theater), *Vices* (Theatre Aspen), *The Aluminum Show* (international tour), *Aida* (Music Theater Wichita), *Man of La Mancha* (Sacramento Music Circus). Past life performing highlights: Original Broadway companies of *Wicked* and *Annie Get Your Gun* ('Tommy Keeler,' Bernadette Peters revival), as well as *How To succeed...*(Matthew Broderick revival), national/international tours of *West Side Story*, Michael John LaChiusa's *Little Fish* (2nd Stage), numerous regional and concert productions. Andrew is the Co-Founding Artistic Director of dre.dance (with Taye Diggs) and an Assistant Professor of Drama at UC Irvine.



Shannon Stoeke

(Co-Author)

Shannon is a Los Angeles based writer and musical theatre actor. As a performer, he has appeared in numerous national/international tours and regional productions including: National Tour of *Camelot*, Tour/New York run of *Cathy Rigby is Peter Pan* and the International Tour of *Hair*. For the last six years Shannon has worked in project development with collaborator and production

partner Taye Diggs. With Diggs, he has developed projects with BET Network and has had ideas featured on the Rachael Ray Show. Shannon is a graduate of the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

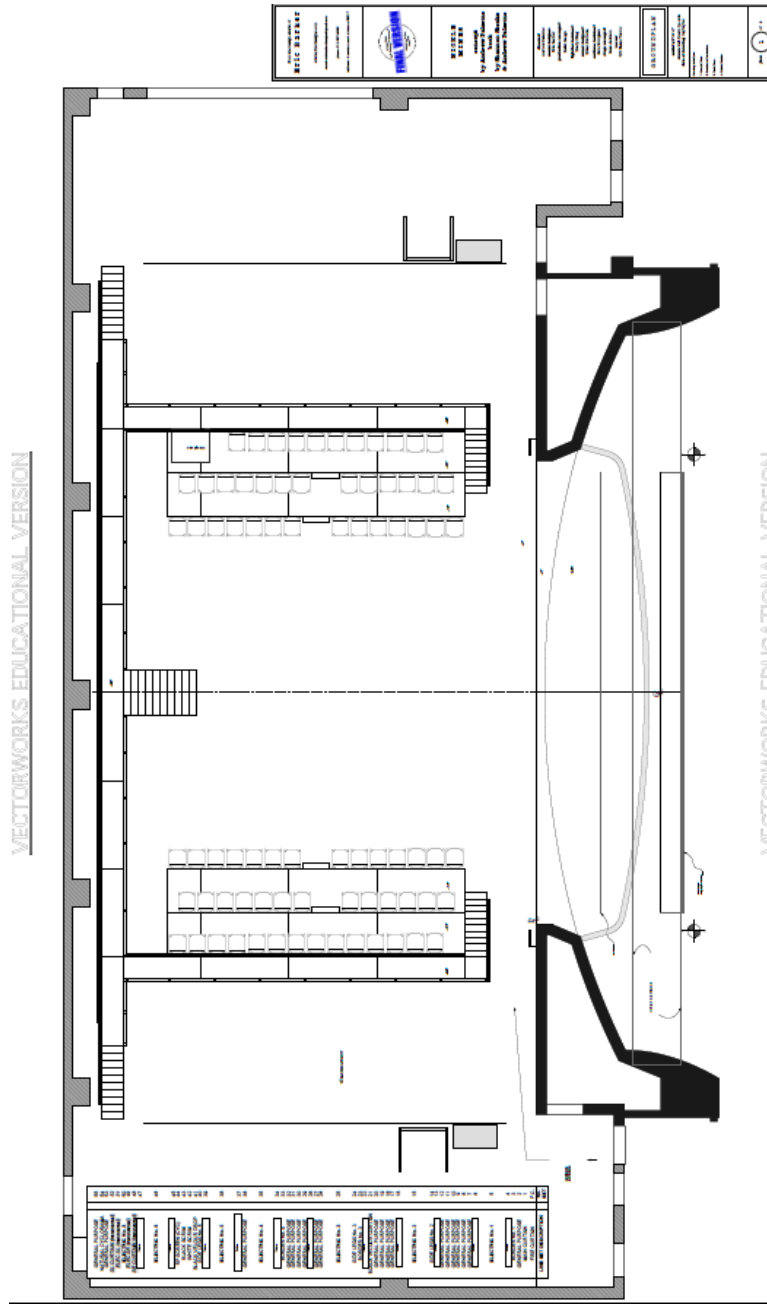


Dan Dyer **(Composer/Lyricist)**

Soul-folk singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Dan Dyer rose to prominence in Austin, TX during the late 90s as frontman of the much heralded bluesrock outfit, Breedlove. For his debut solo album, “...Of What Lies beneath,” (2004) Dyer headed to New York City and Miami to collaborate with veteran rock legend Lenny Kravitz, who produced and released the record on Kravitz’s own Reprise imprint label, Roxie Records. Dyer then returned to Austin to record and release his 2008 self-titled album, a soul-revivalist recording produced by David Boyle in

an old snake-charmer church turned studio. “Dan Dyer” was named one of the top 10 local albums of 2008 by both the Austin American Statesman and The Austin Chronicle, and climbed to the #3 R&B spot on iTunes within a week of its digital release. Dyer has toured the US extensively, in support of his own releases, and alongside artists such as Lenny Kravitz, Corinne Bailey Rae, Rufus Wainwright, Laura Izibor, Ledisi, and others. He has performed at major festivals such as Bonnaroo, Austin City Limits, Essence Music Festival, Voodoo Music Experience, and New Orleans Jazz Fest’s Annual Piano Night at the House of Blues.

Nickel Mines premiered on May 31, 2014, entirely on the stage of UC Irvine's Claire Trevor Theatre. Below is the original ground plan, which consisted of a multi-level structure around a main center stage, with audience seating (on the theatre's stage) on either side. While this layout worked very well, *Nickel Mines* could be performed on a traditional proscenium stage, done in the round, or adapted to a simpler "concert-like" format for more conservative runs.











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NICKEL MINES

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On October 2, 2006, a 32-year-old husband and father entered an Amish schoolhouse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, took hostage ten girls ages 6 to 13, shot five of them to death, critically injured the remaining five, then took his own life. Hardly the stuff of your average, everyday musical, and in fact Andrew Palermo's *Nickel Mines* (co-written with Shannon Stoeke and Dan Dyer) proves neither average nor everyday but something quite extraordinary indeed, tragedy turned into art, and the power of grace as it may never have been shown before.



Extraordinary proves a fitting way of describing the families of those slain and wounded girls, whose forgiveness of their attacker and embrace of his grieving mother, widow, and children might seem as unfathomable to most of us as it is profoundly inspirational.

Equally inspirational is *Nickel Mines*, whose "work-in-progress" debut at UC Irvine will surely be but the first of many to come.

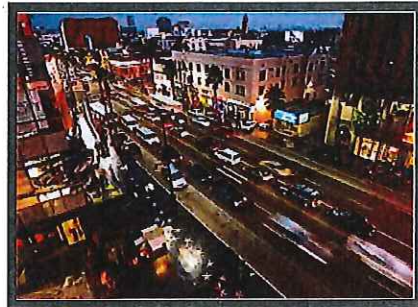
UCI is fortunate indeed to have Broadway vet Palermo, the Scenie-winning choreographer of last year's College/University Musical Of The Year *Spring Awakening*, on their faculty and to have his visionary work (conception, direction, and choreography by Palermo, book by Stoeke and Palermo, music and lyrics by Dyer) quite literally "onstage" at the Claire Trevor Theatre.

Palermo's brilliance is evident from *Nickel Mines*' striking opening number "10-2-2006," which depicts the minutes leading up to the shooting—and the shooting itself—in mesmerizing dance.



Words then take over as cast member Morgan Hollingsworth strums and sings "Song Of Samuel," recounting in song—and in as stunning a voice as you're likely to discover any time soon—the events of that fateful day.

Over the rest of *Nickel Mines*' intermissionless ninety minutes, Stoeke and Palermo's powerful book, Dyer's gorgeous songs, and Palermo's graceful, dramatic, evocative choreography give us one deeply emotional vignette after another of lives transformed by a man named Charles Carl Roberts IV, who until October 2nd had been nothing more to the Pennsylvania Dutch community living in Bart Township than the man who delivered their milk every morning.

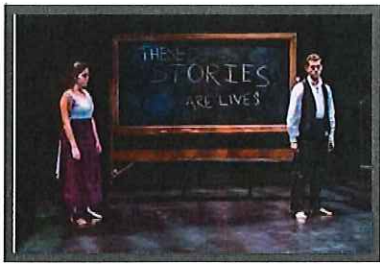


Since 2007, Steven Stanley's StageSceneLA.com has spotlighted the best in Southern California theater via reviews, interviews, and its annual StageSceneLA Scenies.

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"There Was A Mother" juxtaposes

the grief of two mothers, one who gave birth two of the victims, the other the killer's wife and the mother of his three small children. "All Is Well With My Soul," sung by Fisher's mother Terri, victim Rosanna's father, and the girls, expresses the extraordinary response of the Amish community to those who might normally have expected vilification rather than forgiveness and reconciliation. "Anna Mae" pays tribute to a 12-year-old who lost her life that October day, and to all those who paid the price for one man's inhumanity.

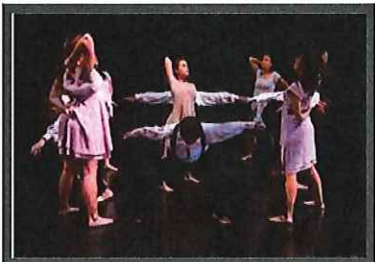


Texas-based singer-songwriter Dyer

has created Nickel Mines' glorious, folk guitar-driven score, one which includes songs inspired by the Amish hymnal—the women's "Loblied/Ordnung" (Amish hymns of praise and guidelines for daily living) and the men's "Ausbund 107:22"—and others that give insight into the events of October 2nd, and the community's reactions in the days that followed.

As for those who might beg to differ with the Amish response to what most would likely find the most unforgivable of crimes, writers Stoeke, Palermo, and Dyer give voice to that view as well, in a father-son confrontation that proves one of the evening's most powerful moments.

It is hard to imagine a more gifted cast, student or professional, than the undergrads gracing this very first production of Nickel Mines.

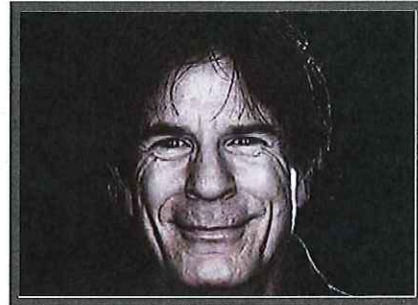


Heidi Bjorndahl (Naomi Rose

Ebersol), Elora Casados (Esther King), Haylee Cotta (Lena Zook Miller), Rachelle Clark (Rachel Ann Stoltzfus), Emma DeLaney (Marian Stoltzfus Fisher), Jamie Espiritu (Rosanna King), Madisen Johnson (Anna Mae Stoltzfus), Réanna Morris (Sarah Ann Stoltzfus), Taylor Sanders (Mary Liz Miller), and Hannah Schwartz (Barbara Stoltzfus "Barbie" Fisher) are each and everyone incandescent, with Casados, Clark, and Morris spotlighted in a trio of superb "adult" performances as (respectively) Mrs. Fisher, Terri Roberts, and Marie Roberts. Spotlighted too are Johnson's dance gifts in "Anna Mae."

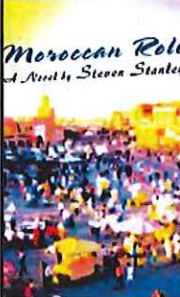
Derrick Gaffney and Alex White do outstanding work as well, Gaffney as the father of the two Fisher girls and White as the father of the profoundly wounded Rosanna (an exquisite Espiritu). Anthony Cloyd and Christopher Renfro are wonderful too as the First Responding Officers to those 911 calls and in various cameo roles.

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As editor of StageSceneLA.com, Steven Stanley is one of Los Angeles' most prolific theater reviewers. He is also the author of *Moroccan Roll*, and an ESL instructor in the English Language Program at California State University, Los Angeles since 1979. ([read more](#))

photo credit: Eric Schwabel



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And then there is Hollingsworth, whose voice is one you'll be hearing for years to come and whose dramatic confrontation opposite an equally fine White makes for one of Nickel Mines' hardest-hitting moments.



Scenic/props designer Eric Barker has the entire audience seated on either side of the Claire Trevor Theatre stage, performers appearing not only in front of but behind and above, the better to give Nickel Mines a "You Are There" quality that proves most effective. (A blackboard plays an important role in Nickel Mines as well.) Sera Bourgeau's costumes, Brady King's lighting, and Brian Svbeda's sound design are as thoroughly professional as they get.

Musical director Dennis Castellano once again merits highest marks for a cast's superb vocals and for conducting a couldn't-be-better orchestra (Castellano and programmer Peter Kerz on keyboards, Melissa Hasin and Steve Velez on cellos, Steve Carnelli and Ryan Schwalm on guitars, and Louis Allee on percussion).



Dramaturg Allison Rotstein and stage manager Ross Jackson lead a behind-the-scenes team too numerous to list here, but whose names receive deserved credit in the Nickel Mines program.

Other musicals have tackled "difficult" topics before this. (Parade and The Scottsboro Boys come immediately to mind.) Nickel Mines might well be the toughest of them all, but miracle of miracles, it works.

I'm told that the creative team consider this first full staging of Nickel Mines an as-yet unfinished work. To this reviewer, it seems pretty darned perfect as it is.

UCI Claire Trevor Theatre, UC Irvine Campus, Irvine.

<http://drama.arts.uci.edu/onstage.html>

—Steven Stanley

June 3, 2014

Photos: Paul Kennedy

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'Nickel Mines' Hits Close To Home

Max Richter | Jun 03, 2014 | Comments 0

"Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life." – Oscar Wilde

When rehearsals began for the world premiere of "Nickel Mines," the show was intended to examine the issue of mass shootings through a theatrical lens. It would artfully give life to tragic moments in history that unfortunately continue to ravage the lives of communities across the country.



Courtesy of Paul Kennedy

The show tells the true story of the 2006 West Nickel Mines School shooting, which occurred in the Amish community of Nickel Mines located in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Ten girls were taken hostage and five, aged 7-13, were eventually killed by Charles Roberts, 32, a member of their own community. "Nickel Mines" tells the story of the community in the wake of the incident, focusing on how the community banded together and coped with the incident through love and forgiveness.

Creator, director, choreographer and faculty member of the Department of Drama at UC Irvine Andrew Palermo drew on facts from the

case and utilized transcripts to tell the horrific story. The performance implements non-traditional musical numbers set to Dan Dyer's powerful original score and several intense interpretive dance routines, which allow the performance to seemingly emanate raw emotion.

Just over a week before the show's first performance, everything changed. Suddenly, the story of "Nickel Mines" transcended the stage when seven were killed and thirteen injured during the Isla Vista tragedy. The show inevitably became a reflection of present day reality as much as a reflection of the incident of 2006. This was further evidenced by the fact that UC police were present at the premiere at the request of UC Irvine.

"The events at UCSB reminded us how important the story we were telling was. It gave life to the piece and a reason we were telling that story," Emma DeLaney, who played Marian Stoltzfus Fisher, a victim of the Nickel Mines shooting, said.

"When this horrible event happened, as much as we wish it didn't, it gave us a purpose," Madisen Johnson, who also portrayed another one of the victims, Anna Mae Stoltzfu, said.

In addition to being members of the cast, DeLaney and Johnson are also part of UCI's Delta Delta Delta sorority, which lost two members from its UCSB chapter during the events in Isla Vista. Both performers commented that this made the experience of performing their roles feel "very real."

On opening night the connection felt by each of the performers was evident, and rarely is a cast so visibly invested in their roles than the cast of "Nickel Mines." The opening scene was one of the most powerful of the show. The interpretive dance piece was stunning, and featured the ten girls who were taken



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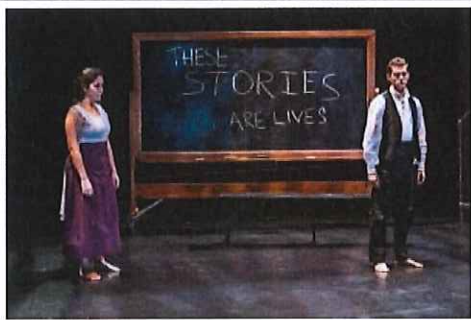
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hostage on stage together. Despite the lack of audible cues of any kind, the performers moved in sporadic bursts simultaneously to the ominous sounds of wind blowing. This conveyed a feeling of panic, fear and confusion, and artfully reconstructed the initial tragic moment of the Nickel Mines shooting.

The use of space was quite unconventional in comparison to other performances at the Claire Trevor Theatre. The entire auditorium seating section is blocked off, and audiences sit on stage on either side of the performance. A second level walkway has been constructed around the stage and several times during the show, performers will be speaking, singing and dancing all around the audience, which provides an unparalleled level of immersion into the show. Audiences will feel as if they are a part of the show, witnessing the events that are taking place along with the characters onstage.

In addition to the incredible dancing performances, the vocal quality exhibited in "Nickel Mines" was top notch, particularly one number during the beginning of the show during which the five deceased girls, played by Delaney, Johnson, Heidi Bjorndahl, Haylee Cotta and Taylor Sanders, sang beautifully as they ascended to heaven.



Courtesy of Paul Kennedy

The original score was brilliantly composed and is incredibly unique. Many of the songs were adaptations of actual Amish hymns mixed with a tinge of soulful gospel bordering on blues that captured the essence of tragedy, faith and the struggle to obey the core tenants of one's faith in times of great sadness.

This struggle is the main focus of the show. Rather than examining the shooting itself, "Nickel Mines" looks at the reaction and the coping methods of the community in the aftermath of the tragedy. Forgiveness is a main pillar of the Amish faith, and at its core, "Nickel Mines" is a story of a community that finds their strength not in hatred,

anger or even sadness, but in love and forgiveness. The parents of the killer are embraced by the community, as are the killer's wife and three children. Through these methods, the Nickel Mines community was able to persevere during their most trying time.

However, not all of the community members were able to forgive the actions of the gunman. This was emphasized by the character of Samuel, a young man who was present when the killer ordered everyone out of the schoolhouse except for the ten girls. Morgan Hollingsworth's portrayal of Samuel was the most human of the show. The guitar-playing rebel who may not return from his Rumspringa regrets not having the courage to take action at the moment he needed it most, and seems to struggle not only with forgiving the man who killed his schoolmates, but also with forgiving himself. Samuel's character is important, as he offers a link to a non-Amish audience, representing the reactions that most people would have to an incident such as this. Hollingsworth's skillful performance is one of the most thought-provoking and relatable portrayals that UCI audiences have seen this year.

Those who get a chance to see "Nickel Mines" will walk away in a meditative trance, contemplating their own capacity for forgiveness, their own ability to shed hatred and anger in the face of life-altering tragedy.

"Forgiveness is not for the killer," DeLaney reflected after the performance. "Forgiveness is for the people who have forgiven him. It releases them."

"Nickel Mines" runs through June 7 at the Claire Trevor Theatre on campus. Tickets are just \$11 for UCI students and are available online at www.arts.uci.edu or through the Arts Box Office

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POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

Due to the subject matter explored in *Nickel Mines*, we have already received a degree of attention from organizations whose mission it is to prevent gun violence and help arrest the alarming trend of increased school shootings. Tragically, in the midst of dress rehearsals, there was a massive shooting at UCI's sister school, UC Santa Barbara. While the deep and intimate humanity of the issues addressed in *Nickel Mines* remained clear throughout the production, this event was a grim reminder that the problem is real and ongoing.

While obviously it is our goal to create good theatre, we are also interested in raising awareness of school violence in a way that not only explores potential alternative reactions to it, but also inherently begs future prevention. We would love for our production to act as a doorway to conversation about this timely topic, perhaps humanizing it to a degree that will render discussions organic, realistic and productive.

We have already had contact with organizations such as Everytown for Gun Safety and The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and we would be honored to stage *Nickel Mines* – or a version thereof – in partnership with these organizations, as a platform to inspire a more layered conversation around this increasingly critical issue.

