

The Anabaptist Play

A STAGED READING



WRITTEN AND
DIRECTED BY
LOUISA NICKEL

Director's Note

My great-great grandfather immigrated to Kansas from Prussia in 1879 with a Mennonite congregation called Alexanderwohl. My father grew up in the same farmhouse they built, as will many more Nickel men to come. Though descended from the revolutionary, and nearly communist Anabaptists, this was a stagnant conservative upbringing.

I am incredibly grateful to have grown up amongst my Dad's new generation of Mennonites. The Mennonites who feed each other every Wednesday and house refugees in their basements. The barefoot ones that fight, and ask questions, and wash each others feet.

This new generation is grappling with pacifism, a keystone in the Anabaptist's faith. I despise violence, but I also know that 1 in 4 women are murdered by people who love them, and I have known those women. Now, pacifism feels like a habit of privilege that only my grandparents can afford.

I'm so excited you are all here to share these existential musings with me!

Special thanks to Ruthann Williams, Greg and Holly Nickel, Taiheid Bradshaw, The Kraine, and the Mennonites

Who were the Anabaptists?

Anabaptism - radical fringe Protestant movement that began in the 1500s

- Ana = "again" in Greek, Baptist → Re-Baptizer
 - Radical Reformation – small movement in the early 1500s focused on returning to the origins of the early church
 - Christianity was no longer focused on faith in Jesus but on participation in church
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Core Beliefs

Adult Baptism

- Centered free will, personal freedom, and living truthfully in the entire religion
- A second baptism meant renouncing your first as an infant, and therefore renouncing the established church itself = blasphemy!
- Second baptism was punishable by death under some legal codes

Separation of Church and State

- Anabaptists were citizens of the kingdom of heaven, not of earth. Therefore, they weren't to be governed by any other laws than God's

Pacifism

- Thousands were tortured and killed because they refused to defend themselves

Martyrdom

- Often identified their suffering with the martyrs, confident they were living at the end of time, expecting the imminent return of Jesus Christ

History & Diaspora

Constantly on the move because they were being imprisoned, tortured, and killed for their beliefs

- The men were drowned and the women burned – referred to as their “Third Baptisms”

The Anabaptists who managed to escape West Europe mostly fled to Prussia — where Germany, Russia, Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic meet today

- Became farmers with an agreement of peace with Catherine the Great
- Led there by Menno Simon, a German Anabaptist leader, in the 1540s
- Renamed themselves Mennonites

In the late 19th century, as tensions in Europe built towards WWI, Prussia was overtaken by Russia, and the pacifist Mennonites were forced to enlist, and were forced to flee again.

The Mennonites fled to the empty Kansas prairie because the land was closest to their former Prussian farmland. The US Government promised religious freedom, so they would be protected from forced military enlistment

A congregation of 475 Mennonites in Prussia, called Alexanderwohl, fled together to what is now Goessel, Kansas in 1873. They built a church under the same name of Alexanderwohl, speaking Plattdeutsch, Low German, until the villainization of the Germans during the World Wars.



Meet the Artists

Zwiebach Recipe

2 cups milk
1 cup butter
2 ¼ teaspoons dry yeast
½ cup lukewarm water
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
6 cups flour



Louisa Nickel (*Writer/Director*) (she/they) is a playwright, designer, and administrator from rural Kansas. They have a love for theatre that pushes the boundaries of tradition and spoken word. Louisa earned a B.A. in theatre from Millikin University in 2022 and is currently living in New York City. Since moving, they have directed a series of theatre workshops at Fort Dix Refugee Center, costumed at Epic Players and produced their play, *A Collection of Small Things* at The New York Theatre Festival. Currently, Louisa is the Wardrobe Supervisor at the off-Broadway production of *The Office Parody Musical*.

Brinn McDonald (*Madge*) (they/them) is a Louisiana native who moved to NYC as soon as they turned eighteen. They attended The American Academy of Dramatic Arts where they affirmed their love of acting and found a new passion in voice and speech, particularly vulnerability exploration and identity work. They are passionate about helping others and the planet and are now working as an actor and writer in the city while running their own voice, speech, and dialect coaching business.

Jennifer Molson (*Margery*) (she/her) is so excited to be a part of *The Anabaptist Play!* You can see her during the week performing off-Broadway in *The Office Parody Musical* as well as singing and serving at Ellen's Stardust Diner in Time Square. Jen loves her dog, making charcuterie boards, and lots of ice cream. She would like to thank her friends and family for their endless support.

Mario Greiner (*Voda*) (he/him) the tech whiz turned (not-yet) Broadway sensation! Hailing from Germany, he packed his lederhosen and leaped across the pond to the Big Apple in 2019. After coding and consulting, Mario decided to follow his heart (and jazz hands) to the NYFA Musical Theatre conservatory. He's been wowing audiences as Fester in *The Addams Family*, charming as Musidorus in *Head Over Heels*, and conning his way into our hearts as André in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. Mario's theatrical talents have graced stages all around the globe, and he's eternally grateful to his rockstar friends and family for their unwavering support. Follow his journey @themariogreiner!

Lucy Rossi (*Mutta*) (she/her) is a ~southern belle~ originally from Fayetteville. Arkansas. Lucy has a deep love of travel which she has been lucky to combine with her passion for theater. She has been seen across North America on tour, in off Broadway theaters, and on the West End in an Olivier Nominated production for Best Family Show!

James Busam (*Frank*) (he/him) is a New York based actor, singer, writer, and musician. He just finished his run as Toby/Creed in *The Office Musical Parody* at The Jerry Orbach Theatre and loves growing his community in the city!

Emma Vance (*Mom*) (she/her) is so excited to be a part of this incredible project! Emma is currently Pam in *The Office Musical Parody* (Off-Broadway). A California native, she has performed all over the country. Some of her favorite credits include *All Shook Up* (Natalie u/s) at Flat Rock Playhouse, *The Music Man* (Zaneeta) at Woodstock Playhouse, and *The Little Princess* (Becky) at Sacramento Theatre Company. So much love to her family, friends, and Lou for this wonderful opportunity! @emma.e.vance

Ian Dembek (*Joe*) (he/him) is so excited to be here! Off Broadway: *The Office: A Musical Parody*! Regional: *Witnesses* (CCAETheatricals), *The Wizard of Oz* (Vital Theatre). NYC: *Dorothy's Adventures in Oz* (92NY), *Anything* (EANWS). ATB Talent. @iandembek

Rachel Pevehouse (*The Wind/Dramaturg*) (she/her) is an actor and writer from St. Louis. She is currently developing a one-woman play, which recently she showcased at Arts on Site NYC. She enjoys yoga, her cat Wesley & dissecting generational religious trauma with her friends.

Joshua R. Wick (*Sound Designer*) (he/him) is an early career sound artist and composer for film, theatre, and animation. His recent credits include *A Collection of Small Things* for NYTF22 and several short films around Bushwick. Joshua would like to thank his friends, family, and partner for their never-ending support as he continues to make meaningful noise in the city full of sounds.