

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. Virginia stage Company has a grand, wonderfully old-fashioned play that seems tailor made for the infinite confines of the Wells Theatre. John Steinbeck's OF MICE AND MEN made me think of the kind of theatre we used to take for granted. For starters it has a cast of ten characters which is almost unheard of these days. I shall state straightaway that each and every one of them is intricately and hauntingly brought to life. Director Chris Hanna and a company of unusually sensitive actors render finely etched portraits of a handful of the legions of underdogs who were caught up in the great Depression.. These people are basically loners without families. They are nearing the end of their ropes and their dreams are faded or fading in clouds of depression dust. There are relationships but they are imperfect and loneliness is everywhere.

Jefferson Breland is an ideal Lennie, a man of Herculean strength with the brain of an eight year old. He is pathetic and yet very amusing at times with an aura of this special human being that we understand. Tony Ward as George, Lennie's reluctant caretaker, has remarkable restraint and control of his conflicting emotions. Fate has put Lennie's life in his hands forever It's a heavy burden but George's love for his friend never falters. Mr. Ward blends every aspect of this complex situation into a compelling, totally satisfying performance of perfection. Like a weaver of woe, Kristin Fiorella as Curley's wife, strolls in and out of the play trying to find a way out of her flawed marriage. She is not so much a tart, as the ranch hands refer to her, but a most touching desperate woman trying to find her new life and maybe even her name which nobody ever uses. I was very moved by her portrayal. Sean Meehan captures the fun, asinine aspects of Curley and his sinister side as well. Ernest Perry Jr. hits the target with every moment as the black ranch hand who lives alone in the barn with only books and memories for company. Robert Nelson plays Candy with heartwarming simplicity. His life revolves around an ancient, no longer functional, sheep herding dog. Nelson also finds the humor inherent in the people of this play. It's the key to their survival. David Hobbs, David Sitler, Terry Jernigan and Chaney Tullos, all make good contributions.

Anita Tripath Easterling has designed a revolving set of skeletal timbers that is effective, with evocative lighting by A. Nelson Ruger IV. Jeni Schaeffer's costumes look a little new and too clean for these hard working poverty stricken folks.

Roy Rogers and Trigger rode happy trails into the sunset. OF MICE AND MEN and Brokeback Mountain look at the lives of ranch hands and cowboys just a little differently. The latter two works are moving chronicles of the diverse struggles that are part of the never ending American dream. This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.