

OF MICE AND MEN

By John Steinbeck

Tidewater Regional Repertory Theatre

Yoder Barn Theatre

July 2- July 4 at 8pm

July 5 at 2pm & 8pm

July 9 at 2pm & 8pm

July 10 - July 12 at 8pm

For tickets call:

(757)671-8100

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

The original Yoder Barn, built in 1899, was reconstructed in 1935 after being destroyed by a fire. Since 1995 it has been a community theatre. In spring of 2007 it was given to Christopher Newport University by the Yoder Preservation Trust, Inc. and has undergone a total renovation. Much of the original structure still remains but I doubt that ole Bossy would recognize the exciting place that was once her home. It's now occupied by the new Tidewater Regional Repertory Theatre Company made up of professional actors.

John Steinbeck's title comes from a line in a poem by Robert Burns, "The best made plans of mice and men often go awry." And so it is for the desperate people who see their dreams deferred or destroyed in this tale of woe that takes place in 1938.

A unique relationship between two itinerant ranch hands, Lennie and George, dominates the story. Lennie, given a stellar performance by Jim Zidar, is mentally a child with the physical strength of a Goliath. His loving touch kills. George, performed by Matthew Gray, attempts to lead his friend through life. It's a lonely and impossible task that ends tragically. Costume designer Locklyn Brooks has dressed George as a dapper (by Depression standards) salesman rather than a hard working, hard sweating ranch hand. In fact, I found most of these under dog people too well dressed for their hard, dirt -poor place in life. Mathew Gray, as do a lot of the other actors, tends to scream and shout too much, but he ultimately finds his way to a believable, moving George. A number of the actors slap the furniture or their bodies a lot. I found that curious.

As the new wife of Curly, the son of the ranch boss, Rachel Hirshom is effective, especially when she doesn't posture and work too hard at being "the tart". Her loneliness in a marriage that obviously is in deep trouble (one suspects it's the groom's problem) is painful to behold. She doesn't even have a name in the play. Her life has been and is as out of focus as her dream to become a movie star.

Ron Reid as the old man called Candy has admirable sympathy and emotional undercurrents in his work. Chamblee Ferguson as Slim is honest and truthful as

an actor and creates a most compelling presence on stage. Will Badgett is the black man Crooks. He gives a performance of admirable restraint hiding rage and pain.

The set is constructed of spanking brand new lumber and unpainted. It comes over as a five star ranch house in the heart of the Depression. I'm not sure what the brilliant George Hillow was trying to tell us but it didn't strike the right note for me. I also found Douglas E. Nobles lighting to be all over the place and lacking in mood and atmosphere. The ambience seems more appropriate for a musical than for this sad and dark account of a "whole country full of mutts" as Curley's wife says. Lennie says, "I don't like this place. This ain't no good place."

Director Steven Breese has staged the play in a visually pleasing and exciting manner and the scenes do come alive with dramatic tension some of the time. One wishes he had gotten more consistently believable performances over all for a dramatic work that approaches naturalism in style.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.