

# Of Mice and Men brilliant

## Neptune's production does justice to Steinbeck's classic

BY GREG MCFARLANE

John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* became an instant classic when it appeared in bookstores in 1937. A story about migrant workers in Depression-era California, it shows the fragile humanity found in people that have no place to call home, yet long for that place all the same. Neptune's stage production of the work conveys this theme brilliantly.

The story follows the lives of George (played by Patrick Galligan) and his gargantuan, mentally challenged friend Lennie (Ashley Wright). George is a Christ figure, constantly bearing the cross of Lennie on his back. He resembles a protective father, but like all those who carry more than they can, George snaps — and Lennie, who knows no better, takes the brunt of his anger. But despite George's outbursts, Lennie lives to please and idolize him.

The characters travel from ranch to ranch, plantation to plantation, looking for work. Often Lennie's ignorance has them fired or chased out of town, but still the two dream of one day owning a small plot of their own land, where they don't have to worry about bosses or constantly relocating for work. They are looking for a home of their own.

The two migrants eventually find themselves on a new ranch, where Curley, the son of the ranch boss, takes an immediate disliking to them. A newly-married domestic abuser, Curley eventually picks a fight with Lennie, and in an attempt to subdue the agitator, Lennie crushes his hand in his fist.

This draws Lennie the affection of Curley's wife, who in this production is not the "tart" the men mistake her for, but is genuinely lonely (this treatment of Curley's wife is far more generous than the original text). From that point the play propels towards its saddening conclusion.

Throughout the production, director Dennis Garnhum never allows the actors to lose touch of the gritty realism found in the novel. Steinbeck portrays the workers as pebbles on a riverbed, fighting against the current, dealing with their situations in their own ways. Neptune remains true to that vision. Especially deserving of credit is James MacDonald, whose portrayal of the calm, yet sensitive Slim provides the anchor the plot spins around. Also, John Dunsworth is exceptional as Candy, an elder migrant who is the realization of the sad, unhappy existence awaiting the men in their later years.

But the centrepieces of the play, George and Lennie, provide the most satisfaction. Wright's comedic timing and vulnerability make him ideal as Lennie, the kindhearted oaf. Galligan's George is convincing as a hopeful dreamer under an angry facade. The connection between the two actors makes the play exceptional in the comical moments, and especially in emotionally-charged moments.

In the end, Neptune treats *Of Mice and Men* with the respect and justice deserving of a novel of such magnitude — and that quality has created a production beyond expectations.



A good act: George (Patrick Galligan) and Lennie (Ashley Wright) in Steinbeck's *Of Mice And Men*.

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