



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 25, 2019

Contact: Berniz House

bhouse@hartnell.edu

(831) 210 - 4663

Written by Heather Osteraa

“Of Mice and Men” Musical Resurrected After 61 Years in Archives

TWS Mounts Revival of the 1958 Off-Broadway Premiere

SALINAS, Calif. – After presenting a staged reading in 2018, The Western Stage has obtained the rights to fully produce Ira Bilowit’s musical adaptation of John Steinbeck’s “Of Mice and Men,” a work that has not been seen onstage since its brief run off-Broadway in 1958, and one which held the Nobel Laureate’s earnest approval throughout its creation. Despite its all-star cast, an untimely newspaper strike forced the show to close before it gained recognition. The National Steinbeck Center acquired the original script and score after Bilowit’s death in 2016 and has graciously made these materials available for The Western Stage to bring the work back to life after 61 years. What’s more, opening weekend will culminate in an exclusive panel discussion, featuring a collection of the big names responsible for making the 2019 revival a reality.

Steinbeck wrote “Of Mice and Men” with the intention of it being presented on the stage. He drew on his experiences being brought up in the “Salad Bowl of America,” where during his teens he worked several summers at a Spreckels Sugar beet farm. That hands-on experience introduced him to the hardships experienced by his fellow farm hands, migrants who had to constantly move to follow the work. Steinbeck witnessed the struggles of workers desperate to achieve some measure of material prosperity but ultimately failing due to circumstances beyond their control. Like many of Steinbeck’s works, “Of Mice and Men” is a cutting portrait of the migrant worker’s struggles as both heroic and tragic.

The well-known dramatic stage production opened on Broadway in 1937 at the Music Box Theatre and ran for 207 performances. However, Steinbeck never attended a single performance of this Broadway production. The reason, as Steinbeck told director George S. Kaufman, was that the play was “perfect” as it existed in his own mind, and anything presented on stage would surely be a disappointment. Not until the creation of the musical would Steinbeck find satisfaction in the treatment of his work.

An arts journalist and lifelong New Yorker named Ira Bilowit (1926-2016) created the piece that captured Steinbeck’s approval. During Bilowit’s lengthy career in arts journalism, he worked as a theater critic, feature writer and editor. Over a half-century, he interviewed many of the leading performing arts practitioners in almost every media, from Tennessee Williams to Milton Berle. Bilowit became inspired after attending an “Evening of Steinbeck,” during which two actors brought him to tears with the last scene from “Of Mice and Men.” He was reminded that Steinbeck’s classic was one of his favorite books. He had also recently seen a production of “The Threepenny Opera” and felt that there was a strong corollary between Steinbeck’s writings and the genre of folk opera.

MORE

Bilowit bought the rights for a six-month window to adapt and write lyrics for “Of Mice and Men” along with a composer. The creative team was in constant communication with Steinbeck during the adaptation process. The author wrote letters full of suggestions, while at the same time telling them he didn’t want to interfere.

The musical premiered at the venerable Provincetown Playhouse in 1958, as part of the then-new Off-Broadway movement. The production boasted an all-star cast, featuring Art Lund, Joanne Sullivan and Leo Penn (father of actor Sean Penn, who coincidentally is a recipient of the John Steinbeck Award). The New York Times called it “a work of substance and power.” The day after the musical opened, a newspaper strike hit New York, and all the city’s newspapers were closed. A few reviews managed to seep through, but it wasn’t enough to gain recognition and build an audience. The musical closed after just six weeks and was never seen onstage again.

After Bilowit’s death, the National Steinbeck Center acquired the materials from his work on the musical. The collection is a treasure trove of original scripts, hand-written scores, photos, publicity clippings and correspondences between Bilowit and Steinbeck. With permission from the Bilowit Estate, the Steinbeck Estate, and the help of the National Steinbeck Center, The Western Stage was able to do a live staged reading of the work in May 2018, which played to an audience of 500 that included Waverly Kaffaga, executor of the Steinbeck Estate, who was so pleased with the reading that she authorized the rights for The Western Stage to produce the show as part of their 2019 season.

Western Stage’s long history of presenting Steinbeck’s works in full-scale production, staged readings and touring shows makes it ideal for presenting Bilowit’s long lost work. TWS Artistic Director Jon Selover will direct the production, which holds a personal significance for him: “Of Mice and Men” was a part of his very first season with The Western Stage in 1984. “To direct a production that was close to Steinbeck’s heart, to bring it back after 60 years, and to do it *here* in Salinas is really quite special,” Selover says.

The Western Stage’s opening weekend of “Of Mice and Men” a Musical Drama will culminate in an exclusive one-night-only discussion panel with world famous Steinbeck experts, including [Anthony Newfield](#) (New York Actor/Director and personal friend of Bilowit, credited with bringing the archived materials to the National Steinbeck Center), [Alice Spivak](#) (Bilowit’s wife during the creation of the musical), [Susan Shillinglaw](#) (world-renowned Steinbeck scholar and San Jose State University professor), [Jon Selover](#) (TWS Artistic Director and Director of TWS’ “Of Mice and Men” reading and revival) and [Waverly Kaffaga](#) (executor of the Steinbeck Estate). The panel will discuss Steinbeck’s process in writing the novel, the creation of the musical, the musical’s evolution from 1958 Off-Broadway premier to 2018 reading and the 2019 revival production. This event is exclusively for ticket holders attending the Sunday matinee on Aug. 25 and will take place directly following the performance. This is in addition to the regularly scheduled ReActions for “Of Mice and Men” on Sept. 8, open to the general public. You may purchase your tickets to attend this special event by contacting the Box Office: (831)-755-6816 or westernstage@hartnell.edu.

Cast list: Lennie Small (**Scott Free***), George Milton (**Colin St. John**), Candy (**Bill Wolak**) Crooks (**Pete Russell**), Curley’s Wife (**Velvet Piini**) Curley (**Jack Clifford**), Slim (**TBA**), Carlson (**Noah Esquivel**) and Whit (**Joshua Reeves**)

*The actor appears through the courtesy of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

“Of Mice and Men” is directed by Jon Selover with music direction by Don Dally, choreography by Heather Osteraa; set design by Theodore Michael Dolas, costume design by Amanda McGee, lighting design by Derek Duarte, sound design by Jeff Mockus and hair and makeup design by Maegan Roux.

*This event is wheelchair accessible. *An ASL interpreter will be present at the Sunday, Sept. 1, performance.* Individuals requiring real-time captioners or other accommodations should contact the Box Office at least one week prior to the event: (831)-755-6816*

DETAILS

WHAT: The Western Stage presents “Of Mice and Men,” A Musical Drama. After presenting a staged reading in 2018, The Western Stage has obtained the rights to fully produce Ira Bilowit’s musical adaptation of Steinbeck’s work, which has not been seen on stage since its brief run off-Broadway in 1958, which held the Nobel Laureate’s earnest approval throughout its creation.

WHEN: Aug. 24, 25, 30-31, Sept. 1 (ASL Interpreter), 7, 8 (ReActions), Sept. 13-14. Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m.

WHERE: Mainstage Theater, K104. Hartnell College Performing Arts Center, Building K, 411 Central Ave., .. Salinas, Calif. 93901.

TICKETS AND INFO: \$26 general admission, \$24 for seniors and military and \$12 for children age 5-15. Hartnell students are free with student I.D. Other students \$20 with I.D. or \$5 Student Rush (cash only) on day of performance. For single or group tickets and information, go to westernstage.com or call (831)-755-6816 (5-8 p.m., Wednesday-Saturday).

ABOUT THE POST-SHOW PANEL DISCUSSION: Following the Aug. 25 matinee, there will be a panel discussion with Steinbeck experts and individuals with insider information about the original production and revival, including Anthony Newfield, Alice Spivak, Susan Shillinglaw, Jon Selover, and Waverly Kaffaga. This exclusive event is available only to ticket-holders of the Aug. 25 performance. The discussion will take place directly following the performance. This is in addition to the regularly scheduled ReActions for “Of Mice and Men” on Sept. 8, open to the general public. You may purchase your tickets to attend this special event by contacting the Box Office: (831)-755-6816 or westernstage@hartnell.edu.

PRESS: Contact Customer Relations Manager, Berniz House by phone: (831)-759-6012 or email: bhouse@hartnell.edu.

ABOUT THE WESTERN STAGE

Founded in 1974, The Western Stage (TWS) has evolved over the past four decades into one of the most respected community-based theaters on California’s Central Coast. TWS is committed to enriching the culture of its community by bringing together professional artists, theatre students and community members to produce a dynamic season of plays that enhances the lives of both the artist and audience, developing new works that speak to the history and culture of the Salinas Valley and providing educational opportunities that allow students of all skill levels to explore and develop their unique talents. www.westernstage.com

HARTNELL COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT – ESTABLISHED IN 1920

The Hartnell CCD serves over 17,000 students annually through its main campus in Salinas, the Alisal Campus in East Salinas, the King City Education Center, and various outreach learning centers throughout the Salinas Valley. Hartnell College, a Hispanic Serving Institution, provides associate degree and certificate programs,

workforce-training, courses in basic skills, and prepares students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Hartnell College is recognized for its innovative public and private partnerships that support world-class education for STEM, career technical education, fine and performing arts, humanities/social sciences, nursing/healthcare, and athletics. We are proud to be the winners of the 2015 Innovation Award for CSin3 – a Computer Science bachelor’s degree in three years. **We are growing leaders through opportunity, engagement, and achievement.** For more about Hartnell CCD, visit www.hartnell.edu.

###