

COMMUNITY THEATRE

Exceptionally good characters in 'Of Mice and Men'

Farmington Players present John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Feb. 11-12 and 10-11 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 24-26, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 13 and 20, at the Farmington Players Barn, Farmington and Orchard Lake roads. Tickets \$12, call (248) 653-2956.

By ROBERT WEIBEL
SPECIAL WRITER

John Steinbeck's classic morality tale, "Of Mice and Men" is set in the Salinas River valley of California in the 1930's. America is in the depths of the Great Depression.

Today's prosperity is almost surreal compared to those desperate times. Under the thoughtful direction of Sue Rogers, the Farmington Players precede the play with black and white slides of the poorest of the poor farmers

to create a mood of despair. About all these folks have are dreams of better times. And so it is with George and Lennie, two migrants moving on to another job, whom we meet on a river bank.

Lennie, played superbly by John Boufford, is huge man-child. Possessed of strength beyond his understanding, he loves to pet soft things like a mouse, a rabbit, a puppy. He is so strong, he can and does on occasion, innocently kill them with too much love. Boufford wisely avoids playing Lennie as a stereotypical village idiot. He creates a character of dimension and sympathy. Thomas Adams effectively plays his tragic friend, George, who attempts to keep Lennie out of trouble.

A greater use of inflections

and pauses would add impact to his important scenes. Trouble is on the horizon as we meet fellow workers on the ranch, Jim Snideman, Phil Hadley, Dave Gilkes, Jim Jernigan and Gene Connolly play a variety of ranch hands. Snideman, as Candy, who has lost a hand in an accident and Connolly, a black man who lives by himself, create exceptionally good characters.

Mike Carraway, the boss, looks terrific, but needs to be more forceful to put the fear of God in his new workers. Frank Gini plays his son, Curley, with appropriate nastiness.

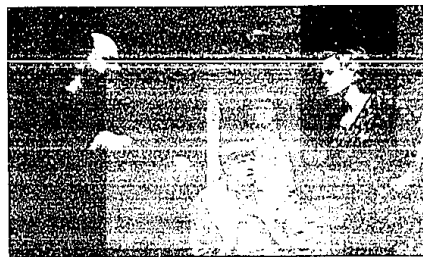
Kathleen Warner does a nice job as Curley's bored new wife, who as they say, has "the eye" for other men. Warner would be even better if she were a bigger tease and more flirtatious. At any rate, she messes with

Lennie, he strokes her hair, she screams, and in trying to quiet her, Lennie inadvertently strangles her. A posse takes off after Lennie. The play ends tragically where it began, on a river bank. George realizes he and Lennie will never have that little place of their own. Lennie never meant no harm.

With a flawed love, George, ends their mutual misery the only way he knows how. The real harm, perhaps, was the way George covered up for Lennie, because society wasn't structured to take care of the Lennies of the world.

One hopes we're doing a better job of it today.

Bob Weibel is a Westland resident who writes community theater reviews for the Observer Newspapers.



Depression Era: Farmington Players Jim Snideman (left), Gene Connolly, John Boufford, Kathleen Warner, and Thomas Adams (background) rehearse John Steinbeck's riveting story.

HAIRY PHOTO BY BILL GILL

Museums collaborate to tell story of African-American dance

BACKSTAGE PASS



ANN DELISI

With America being pelted by a torrent of trivia TV game shows, permit me to ride the wave by asking a couple of quick questions in the visual and performing arts category.

1) Which of the following dance crazes received their creative spirit from African American dance?

- a) The Slow Drag
- b) The Charleston
- c) The Twist
- d) All of the above

2) Which of the following Detroit area cultural institutions is presenting the exhibit:

"When the Spirit Moves: African American Dance in History and Art?"

- a) The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
- b) The Detroit Historical Museum
- c) All of the above

The answers to both questions are: all of the above (d and c).

In a unique collaboration, the Detroit Historical Museum and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History are jointly presenting this sweeping exhibit through mid-April from two distinctly different approaches.

The history exhibit at the

Detroit History Museum on Woodward Avenue tells the story of African American dance from its beginnings in Africa to the present. With video, rare musical instruments and masks used in African dance through the ages, it makes a strong case about the dominant influence of African dance in the shaping of American cultural identity. Particularly fascinating is a demonstration of how the melding of features in African and European line dancing formed the roots of the "called" American square dance tradition.

"Spirit Moves"

Doh-see-doh down the road a piece to the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History on East Warren and you

can experience the artistic component of the "When the Spirit Moves" exhibit. The works of more than three dozen African American artists are exhibited, including Benny Andrews, John Biggers and Elizabeth Catlett, with each piece reflecting the history of African dance.

In the words of exhibit curator Dr. Samella Lewis, "The art responds to cultural impulses and historical realities. African American dance gave meaning and beauty to its people. The strength and appeal of this dance tradition was so great that it also shaped and impacted White dance and culture."

A poignant docudrama about Alan Turing, the man who broke the Enigma code during WWII.

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www.charleswrightmuseum.org

On the next edition of Detroit Public TV's BACKSTAGE PASS, airing 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 13, segment host Nkenge Zola takes viewers on a tour of both exhibits.

One last question. Why is "When the Spirit Moves: African American Dance in History and Art" such an appealing exhibition?

- a) It celebrates a form of expression that has had tremendous impact on American culture.
- b) It exposes the works of some great artists to a broad audience, both at the museums and to viewers of BACKSTAGE PASS.

c) It represents a significant collaboration between two worthy cultural institutions, which are offering workshops with shuttle service to the exhibits, and discounted tickets for those visiting both venues.

d) All of the above. I think you know the answer. You've been a wonderful contentment. As a parting gift, don't forget to play the home version of Detroit's cultural scene, BACKSTAGE PASS.

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