PERFORMANCE OPTION IN LIEU OF THESIS
PERFORMING THE ROLE OF JIM CASY
IN JOHN STEINBECK’S
THE GRAPES OF WRATH
ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY
FRANK GALATI

By

Jason Weiss

A PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Abstract of Performance Option in Lieu of Thesis  
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PERFORMING THE ROLE OF JIM CASY  
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*THE GRAPES OF WRATH*  
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FRANK GALATI  

By  
Jason Weiss  

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This paper details the creative and technical processes implemented in developing the role of Jim Casy in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* adapted by Frank Galati. The performance took place in the Constans Theatre in the Nadine McGuire Theatre and Dance Pavilion at the University of Florida from January 28 – February 6, 2011. The paper has three sections that are devoted to detailing the development of the role of Jim Casy which are: initial research, the rehearsal process and a self-evaluation of my performance and acting process. This paper details the amalgamation of internal and external acting approaches used in creating an honest and interesting portrayal of Jim Casy.
INTRODUCTION

John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath is a milestone of American literature. It illustrates the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, highlighting one man’s vehement reaction to injustice (Tom Joad), another man’s quest for peace and equality (Jim Casy), and a woman’s steadfast strength (Ma Joad). The novel captures the despair of the Great Depression and examines the very nature of equality and justice in America. Although it follows the journey of the Joads, an Oklahoma family who have been driven off their homestead and forced to travel west to the promised land of California, the novel tells the story of thousands of men and women whose plights would transform the nation. Out of the family’s many trials and tribulations against the hard realities of a country divided into those who have and those who do not evolves a drama that is intensely human, yet majestic in scale and moral vision; elemental, yet plain spoken; tragic, but ultimately stirring in its human dignity.

My own personal journey to John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath, adapted for the stage by Frank Galati, was filled with almost as many twists and turns as the Joads’ trek to California. It began fifteen years ago in the summer of 1996. I was interning at Flat Rock Playhouse in Flat Rock, North Carolina, and was 3 months away from entering my senior year at the University of Miami, where it had been announced that The Grapes of Wrath would be the first show of the season. At this time, I was considered the top actor in the program and the ubiquitous choice to play the central role of Tom Joad. The
director of the show, Bruce Lecure, was not only my advisor, but I was also his teaching assistant and, in many ways, his friend. In other words, the role was mine.

At the time, I was 21 years of age, abound with confidence, and believed that I was a year away from taking Hollywood by storm. Since I had so many factors on my side, I didn’t think I had to do too much to prepare for the audition. I did not bother to read the novel, nor did I do any research about the era. My preparation consisted solely of watching the 1940 film version starring Henry Fonda (or at least the first and last twenty minutes of it). When I arrived back in Miami in late August of 1996, I went to the audition with the confidence of Achilles at the gates of Troy. At the callbacks, I ignored all of the training I had received, and conducted myself like a young man with a silver platter in front of him. As a result, I ended up doing a poor imitation of Henry Fonda. There was no hunger, desire or baring of my soul to show the director that I was the man for the job. At the end of the day, I got the impression that something had gone terribly wrong.

The following morning, I pushed my way through the crowd at the callboard to check the cast list, and was shocked that I didn’t see my name next to “Tom Joad.” The name on the sheet was foreign to me; a graduate student from the English department. When my initial shock subsided, I scanned down the sheet to find my name, only to discover that I was to play “First Narrator” and “Man with Guitar.” I stood there for a moment with my mind racing and then retired to my apartment where I contemplated whether or not I should accept the roles. I felt as if I had been slapped in the face, and that slap stung all the more because the assailant was my mentor. I spoke to Bruce in the coming days to ask him why he had not cast me as Tom Joad. After all, I deserved the
role, and everyone knew it. Why would he cast a graduate student in the English department who had never been in one of our plays before? His reply was very simple and without cushion. He told me that he gave me every chance to earn the role, but that in read after read, I did nothing to show him that I deserved it. I didn’t show him any passion, spirit, danger or desire. I had relied on my relationship with him to get the role, rather than showing him via preparation and hard work that I was best suited for it.

My young and arrogant ears were not ready to hear such unfiltered truth, and it took me some time to understand that Bruce Lecure had taught me the most valuable lesson I would learn at school. His words ring in my ears to this day and, because of that, I never take any opportunity for granted. Not getting cast as Tom Joad became the first defining moment of my young career. I vowed to myself that I would one day play the role, and I would play it to the best of my ability.

Many years have passed since my senior year at the University of Miami. In that time, I earned my way into 3 acting unions, performed professionally in dozens of New York theatres as well as regional theatres and Shakespeare festivals. I appeared in several film and television projects, including a 3-year stint on a major ABC daytime drama. I shot or provided voice-overs for a dozen national and regional commercials, and I directed for the stage and the camera. I am currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree in Acting at the University of Florida. I’ve accomplished many of my goals over the years, and I can look at my career and consider it a success. However, one of my goals has always eluded me. Throughout all my time in New York City and Los Angeles, I never got the opportunity to audition for The Grapes of Wrath, and therefore fulfill my vow to play Tom Joad. I began to think it would never come to fruition, and that I would
have to move on with my life and my career—until the opportunity finally presented itself to me.

In the fall of 2009, the first semester of my 2nd year at the University of Florida, my class was charged by the Season Planning Committee of the School of Theatre and Dance to suggest plays that offered us potential thesis roles, performance projects that are the culminating event of the three year actor training program. I saw in this an opportunity I could not ignore. Due to the current state of our economy, *The Grapes of Wrath* was perhaps the most relevant it had been in years, and I was finally at an appropriate age to play the seminal character of American literature at the center of this story. I proposed the play to the committee and wrote a thorough argument for it. To my great satisfaction, *The Grapes of Wrath* was ultimately chosen for the 2010-2011 season. After years of waiting, wondering and hoping, my ambition to play Tom Joad could finally be realized, and this time I was ready to earn it.

**RESEARCH**

I. TOM JOAD VERSES JIM CASY

When I had my first meeting with Dr. Charlie Mitchell, the director of *The Grapes of Wrath*, he asked me whom I wanted to play as my thesis role: Tom Joad or Jim Casy? The question surprised me. Fifteen years of longing had made me intent on playing only the former. I told him that I hadn’t even considered playing Jim Casy. He told me to take the summer to think it over because he was of the opinion that Casy was the soul of the play and that, while he was certain I would make a fine Tom Joad, he believed that
Casy would be the role into which I could really sink my teeth. Doubtful, I reluctantly agreed to take the summer to think about it. However, it would not be like the summer of 1996 when I prepared by watching part of a film and nothing more. This time, I would do my due diligence and leave nothing to chance.

I looked deep into the character of Tom Joad to find his center. I pictured myself as Tom as I read, with all of his actions being performed and all of his lines being spoken by me. This wasn’t particularly difficult, seeing as I had been fixated on this character for 15 years. As I read the novel, I paid close attention to all of the descriptions of Tom Joad, and made many margin notes with ideas for character work such as:

- He is not over 30
- His eyes are very dark brown
- His hands are hard
- He is tall

The physical characteristics were very close to my own, making the role a good “fit”. Also, I found his outlook familiar as well. When he returns home from prison and Ma asks him if prison life has made him angry, Tom replies, “I was for a little while. But I ain’y proud like some fellas. I let stuff run off’m me” (Steinbeck 76). His time in prison has given him a new perspective and he wants to make a new and honest life for himself. I can understand that point of view because it parallels my choice to leave New York and go back to school. Like Tom, I had to leave my pride behind so that I would be able to grow and start a new life in school. Furthermore, I was also drawn to his transformation in the story. By the end of the novel, Tom’s outlook has changed drastically and he is
more concerned for his fellow man than he is for himself. This is best expressed in his final conversation with Ma:

I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where – wherever you look. Wherever there’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever there’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’ – I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build – why, I’ll be there.

See? God, I’m talking like Casy (Steinbeck 419).

This presented a rich and interesting character arc for the role. When I was through with the novel, I knew that I could play Tom Joad and was convinced that I could play him quite well. However, I told Dr. Mitchell that I would consider both characters, so I picked up the book again and started from the beginning, this time focusing on Jim Casy, the man whom Tom, by his own admission, comes to emulate.

Admittedly, this was a much more difficult task. I had already done the groundwork for Tom and was convinced I wanted to play him. It was not easy to get the voice of Tom Joad out of my head. Despite the difficulty, I forged ahead, pencil in hand, on my path to “discovering” Jim Casy. Again, I marked all descriptive passages and took notes in the margins.

As I read, a clear picture of Casy began to take shape in my head. I could see him and hear him in my mind’s eye. He was like a homeless drifter I might see on the streets of Gainesville or a subway car in New York City:
• Lean and sinewy
• Grey haired and road worn
• Eyes that have seem many things they’d like to forget
• A man on the edge

The character became clearer as I read, and I started to understand what Dr. Mitchell meant when he said Casy is the “soul of the play.” He is a man who knows that he wants something else, but isn’t sure of what it is. He knows there has to be something better, but doesn’t know where to find it. He is a simple man full of complexity, and although he is wandering, he certainly is not lost. Casy intrigued me because I could see so much of myself in him. He carries around the pain of his past, but does not pin it to his sleeve for all to see. Like other characters in The Grapes of Wrath, Jim Casy is highly symbolic and represents a specific point of view that was held by a certain segment of the migrant population of the Great Depression; one that believes that, at its core, humanity is divine and has the ability to save itself. This was a point of view with which I connected. These would be the qualities that eventually drew me even more strongly to Casy than to Tom Joad.

II. JIM CASY ON PAPER

Once I embraced the idea of playing the role, I soon realized how loaded Jim Casy is as a dramatic figure. He is a former preacher and long-time friend of the Joads. He is a latter-day Christ figure who longs to bring religious stability to the migrant families heading west. Steinbeck goes so far as to give Jim Casy the exact initials as the biblical Savior (J.C.), yet Casy’s relation to Christ goes beyond the superficial, and plays
out in their similar plans of action. Much like Christ, Casy is a radical, challenging authority and risking persecution as a union instigator, and like Christ, becomes a martyr for his beliefs. Also, like Christ, he retreated into the forest in order to soul-search and to discover the answers to difficult questions. He actually compares himself to Christ and his actions while saying grace at the Joads’ breakfast table, “…I been in the hills, thinkin’, almost you might say like Jesus went into the wilderness to think His way out of a mess of troubles…I got tired like Him…I got mixed up like Him” (Steinbeck 81). I realized that Casy offered me a rich, almost mythic character and back-story that could be a rewarding exploration for me as an actor.

Furthermore, I discovered that, although his participation in the narrative wanes as they approach California, the first half of the novel rests heavily on Casy as a spiritual guide for the Joads. Even though he has given up his belief in the traditional idea of God, in the eyes of the Joads, Casy is still “The Preacher.” But he is a disillusioned man of God, in part because of his tendency to sleep with women to whom he preaches: “Then you know what I’d do? I take one of the girls out in the grass an’ I’d lay with her. I done it ev’ry time” (Steinbeck 22). This flaw makes Casy human, and I found him to be easily relatable as a man confused about himself, searching for a greater purpose.

I was also intrigued by the early exchanges between Tom and Casy. Casy says, “‘What’s gnawin’ you? is it the screwin’?’ An’ I says, ‘No, it’s the sin.’ An’ I says, ‘Why is it that when a fella ought to be just about mule-ass proof against sin, an’ all full up of Jesus, why is it that’s the time a fella gets fingerin’ his pants buttons?’…I says, ‘Maybe it ain’t a sin. Maybe it’s just the way folks is’. ” Casy continues, explaining his new philosophy, “I don’t know nobody named Jesus. I know a bunch of stories, but I only
love people.” He says, “I figgered about the Holy Sperit and the Jesus road. I figgered, Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? Maybe, I figgered, maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit - the human sperit - the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of. Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of a sudden--I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it” (Steinbeck 24). I was attracted to Casy’s blunt honesty.

After Casy dies, Tom, like one of Casy’s disciples, talks of the preacher, recalling that, “One time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an’ foun’ he didn’t have no soul that was his’n. Says he foun’ he jus’ got a little piece of a great soul… I know now a fella ain’t no good alone” (Steinbeck 403). This “great soul” becomes one of the main themes in the novel, the seeds of which are planted by Casy. If Casy’s speech planted the seeds, his actions, and ultimately his death, are what germinate them. This can be seen when Ma replies to Tom’s statement and comes to acknowledge this interconnectedness: “not even so self-contained as a single family but all the destitute as a single soul” (Steinbeck 404). And it is perhaps no more stunningly expressed than in the novel’s climactic moment when Tom Joad’s sister, Rose of Sharon, allows a starving stranger to drink milk from her breast. Steinbeck’s writing had made Dr. Mitchell’s case for him, and the director was quite pleased to hear that I was excited to play the Christ-figure Casy in The Grapes of Wrath. Interestingly, the investigation that followed Dr. Mitchell’s challenge that I consider the role of Casy over Tom prompted some valuable self-discovery. In the process, I realized that I was no longer interested in playing a leading role solely because it is the lead. Instead, I’d rather play a character that has a compelling arc, and whose journey has many obstacles in its way. I enjoy playing quirky
character types, violent and dangerous characters, anti-heroes and other non-leading man
types. I find these characters to be fulfilling, enlightening, and fun. This is perhaps the
reason why I have still not played the role of Tom Joad; he may not be the “best fit” for
my tastes and talents. Regardless, I now had a decisive goal, albeit different from the
goal I had imagined for 15 years, and could commence with my character research and
development of Jim Casy.

III. EXPLORING THE PLAY

Before rehearsals began, I prepared by reading the play adaptation by Frank
Galati. The first thing I noticed was the playwright’s description of Casy’s clothing in the
appendix of the play: “Distressed summer linen two piece suit, textured vest, distressed
canvas shoes, black bowler hat, distressed formal shirt, rope belt, maroon kerchief”
(Galati 112). This description gave me a sense of the life Casy had lived up until the
opening moment of the play. Everything about his wardrobe indicates that he has a rough
and worn appearance, suggesting that he has been on the road for quite some time, facing
hardship; a man of the land who survives by his own perseverance and by the good will
of people he encounters along the way. Therefore, I knew that clothing would be a very
important issue for me as an actor, so I emailed the costume designer, Rebecca Joy
Wallace, to ask if I could have some input into my wardrobe. I believe that, as an actor, I
should play a part in designing my wardrobe because, at the end of the day, it’s my
character. I think it is preposterous for an actor to spend months researching and
developing a character only to be given a costume that may or may not be what that actor
had been imagining. I told her that “finding” Casy would be a process for me, and that I
would like the chance to develop his wardrobe in rehearsals. When she replied in the positive, I was relieved. The two of us met and she showed me her initial renderings of Casy’s costume. It consisted of a large preacher’s hat, a blue shirt, and an old worn suit. I was immediately drawn to the suit, though skeptical about the preacher’s hat. Throughout the play, Casy states that he’s not a preacher on 4 separate occasions. This being the case, I did not think that he would wear an article of clothing that would give anyone the impression that he is still a preacher. However, I put my doubts momentarily aside: after all, I had also been skeptical about playing Casy at one time. We happily agreed to let the costume evolve over the course of rehearsal. This accommodation by Ms. Wallace was indicative of how collaborative the entire process would be.

As I read the play, I was reminded that, as a former preacher, Casy used to be quite a talker: “I did enough talkin’ when I was a preacher to last me the rest of my life” (Galati 41). He was a man who “showed people the way” and who set them on “the right path.” I had to ask myself what that meant. When crowds of people hang on one’s every word, what does that do to a man? How does it affect his confidence and cadence and his willingness to be the man he strives to be? These questions would ultimately be explored in detail during the rehearsal process. I did not want to make any firm choices prior. One thing was certain, though: Casy was a talker, a talker who spoke with passion and verve. Through his many long, eloquent speeches, the text made it clear that, even though he was no longer a preacher, he certainly held on to his oratory skills. They define him, and as an actor playing Casy, it was my job to keep that in mind as I worked to render a faithful portrayal.
REHEARSAL PROCESS

I. DIALECT WORK

On Saturday, November 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2010, the rehearsal process began with a reading of the script out loud by the full cast. The director chose to have us actors on our feet and move around rather than sit at a table. The idea behind this was to allow us to find the characters in both our mouths and bodies. Up until this point, I had not made any firm choices for Casy; however, before I knew it, a strong choice emerged on its own. By the time I was through the first page of dialog, I found myself almost instinctively speaking with a Southern drawl; a Georgia dialect to be exact. This was not planned at all, but as I read further, and the scenes rolled on, the dialect slowed my speech pattern, and gave my voice a gravelly depth and a certain gravitas that truly served Casy. I found that it separated him vocally from the others in the play, namely the Joads, underlining his role as “outsider”; and the Joads’ acceptance of an outsider like Casy into their close-knit family would only add to his mystique. I decided to explore this instinctual choice for the remainder of the read, and found it nothing but useful. By the end of that first rehearsal, I was certain that I was going in the right direction. The problem was that nowhere in the script does it indicate that Casy is from Georgia. This was a major concern for me because I don’t believe that an actor should simply adopt a dialect for the purposes of making his character more “interesting.” I spoke to the director after the read, and we agreed that the dialect was interesting, but that we had to find a way to justify it. The justification came rather quickly when we both recognized that Steinbeck never reveals Casy’s home in the novel. This gave us the freedom to make creative choices.
regarding Casy’s past that still honored the logic of the story and the intent of the writer. My invention of Casy’s Georgia upbringing seemed capable of doing both.

I spent the next week of rehearsals continuing my exploration of this dialect and found that it not only aided in establishing a speech pattern, but that it affected my movement and internal rhythms as well. The starting point for any dialect is to isolate the sounds that are specific to that dialect. For a Georgia accent, I started with its distinctive “R” sound. There are a lot of variations on what is commonly called a “Southern accent.” One variation typically doesn’t have an “R” sound after vowels, like one often used in the plays of Tennessee Williams or found in Gone with the Wind. For this dialect, unless it is written before a vowel, the “R” is silent. For example, in the phrase, “A green bird is brighter,” one striving to achieve the dialect would pronounce the “R” sounds in the words “green” and “brighter,” but not in the word “bird” or the second syllable of the word “brighter”. Phonetically, the phrase would sound out as: A green bahd is brightah. This altered sound is what Arthur Lessac, voice and speech theorist, would call #3 vowel structure, “A round lip opening…[with] optimal space between the teeth, complete cheek-muscle-yawn extension, and a lip opening just large enough to permit easy passage of the vertically positioned thumb” (Lessac 165). By allowing the aperture of the lips to be relaxed and rounded, rather than tight and pulled back, I was able to achieve the sound I wanted on a regular basis without causing any vocal discomfort or strain, creating an authentic dialect for the former Georgia preacher whom I was portraying.

With this adjustment as a base, it became quite easy to find the rest of the vowel and consonant substitutions that the dialect requires. The “oi” sound as in “joyful,” which is known as #3y in the Lessac system, opens up and becomes more rounded and
abbreviated. If done correctly, it will sound more like the #3 vowel sound, as in the word “law.” The long “I” sound in words such as “sign,” and “dry,” noted as #6y in the Lessac system, becomes a #6, like the vowel sound in “ask,” with “the tongue tip pressed gently against the lower teeth as the tongue widens a bit and the lips widen just enough to accommodate the widened tongue while maintaining a relaxed forward facial posture” (Lessac 166). Also, the “ng” sound in words like “waiting” becomes “n”, sounding more like “waitin.” However, to do the dialect properly, the “t” before the second syllable must be modulated as well, by swallowing the “t” sound and putting it in the back of the throat with a slight guttural burst.

I am lucky to have a very good ear for dialects, and can pick them up quite easily. However, the vowel and consonant changes are not enough to produce an authentic dialect. I also had to find the speech pattern and cadence of the regionalism. My own speech pattern is very different from the Georgia dialect. Growing up in and around New York City, I tend to speak quickly and relatively loudly. Neither qualities serve the Southern dialect, so I had to find a way to slow my natural rhythms down and discover more variety in volume and pace. In order to do this, I listened to as many authentic sources as possible. I was able to search for and listen to native speakers from specific regions of Georgia at YouTube.com, accent.gmu.edu, and myaccent.info. By listening to recordings of these people, I could more fully understand and emulate the nuanced pitch changes and stress patterns of their colloquial speech.

In order to further define and particularize Casy’s speech pattern, I also listened to Southern preachers. My neighbor is a member of Westside Baptist Church in Gainesville, FL. She was kind enough to take me to Sunday services with her. While I was there, I
heard Pastors Phil Young and Gary Crawford speak. While neither of them is from Georgia, both possessed a Southern “musicality” in their manner of speaking. I listened to the way they shaped their words and sentences, both during the service and afterwards as they were talking individually to parishioners, and I noticed a “certainty” in their delivery. I noted that their pitch, tone and volume changed often as they stressed particular points. While many orators use these shifts to get their points across, these gentlemen had an inviting, soothing tone; they did not lecture the crowd, but spoke to them in such an eloquent way that I was subdued as if by a lullaby. I discovered that language is important for these men—what they say and how they say it—because it is what they use to spread the word of God, and each word must be cherished and given the opportunity to ring out like the bells of Saint Sebastian. In watching these men at work, I came to realize that there are no inconsequential words to a Southern preacher.

When I infused my portrayal of Casy with what I observed at the church that day, I came away with a more complete idea of who this man is. Casy understands the value of language. He is not seeking adulation, nor is he seeking fame and fortune. He is a man on a spiritual path of discovery who is more interested in the safety of his fellow man than for himself. His tools for that end are his words because, in many ways, words are all he has. He is in a unique position to understand the power of those words, as he has abused them in the past to seduce young women. However, he has learned from the mistakes of his youth and now brandishes his words with care. He knows that whether he likes it or not, people are going to listen to what he has to say due to the fact that he was once a preacher. This is a hard responsibility. This realization cemented in me the notion
that Casy spoke slowly and with great intent; Casy is not a man of few words, but he is a man who carefully chooses *when* to speak.

**II. PHYSICALITY**

As I explored in rehearsal how he might speak, I also began to discover how Casy might move as well. The speech patterns of rural Georgia have a slower rhythm than my own speech, and I found that when I employed them in the rehearsal room, they also slowed my movements. The slower rhythms gave Casy a pensive quality that did not allow for sharp and sudden movement. My interpretation of Casy was a contemplative man who would not act without thinking.

Also, it was important for my physical character work to acknowledge that Casy is much older than me. Tom is described as “not being over thirty” (Steinbeck 6), which implies that he is in his late twenties. In their first meeting, Casy says to Tom, “You wouldn’t remember me, I guess. Baptized you in the irrigation ditch” (Galati 10). If he baptized Tom when he was a young child, then Casy must be at least 25 years older than Tom, making him a man in his mid-fifties. If I were to move with the alacrity of my 35 years, the illusion of this elder character would quickly be destroyed. If I wanted to stay true to Steinbeck, it was vital that my movements match my manner, and I found that if I led with speech choices, my movement choices would follow.

I didn’t want to fall into the trap of “playing age” in the production. Often times when younger actors play older characters, they play the stereotype of age. They walk hunched over and shuffle their feet to give the impression of “being old.” This approach prevents them from finding authenticity in their work. My approach to finding Casy’s age
in my performance was quite different. I looked to the given circumstances of the story to find clues by which to discover Jim Casy’s walk. Casy is twenty years older than I am. He has been roaming and wandering around the Plains for years, where he has suffered from the harsh realities of the Dust Bowl of the 1930’s. He feels the unforgiving wrath of the road. What this meant to me was that Casy is not a decrepit man, but a tired man. He has aches and pains that come from a life on his feet. This realization gave me another clue by which to find a physicality that would bring Casy to life.

In rehearsal, I focused on my feet. I thought that perhaps Casy’s shoes might be a little too small for him, as he is poor and must make do with what he gets. So I went to the local Goodwill store, purchased a pair of shoes that were one half size too small for me, and started wearing them in rehearsal. I wanted to know what it felt like to have uncomfortable shoes, and to wear them for long periods of time. What I found was that they not only made my feet ache, but that they affected other parts of my body as well. I started holding tension in my legs in an effort to muscle through the pain in my feet. This led to calf and thigh pains that tended to linger. I also experienced tension in my shoulders from bearing the pain in my lower body. All in all, my whole body was tense and tight as a result of the size 9 leather shoes. Out of that discomfort, I found a specific way of moving. I moved slowly, but with intent. I discovered that I did not focus on the fact that my feet hurt, but rather on finding a way to do what I had to do, despite my aching feet. For example, if I had to stand up and walk over to somebody, I didn’t “play the pain.” Instead, I would do everything I could to ignore and overcome the pain to get to my destination. This exemplifies two fundamental aspects of contemporary acting theory as defined by the preeminent acting theorist of the 20th Century, Constantin
Stanislavski: *objective* and *obstacle*. In the above instance, my immediate objective is to cross to speak with someone, but my obstacle—what stands in the way of me accomplishing my goal—is that it hurts to walk. The question becomes: how do I overcome my obstacle in order to achieve my objective? There are a few ways to do this, and these ways, in acting theory, are commonly called *tactics*. One tactic might be to cross intently and soldier through the pain. Another tactic might be to take off my offending shoes and walk barefoot. Regardless of the tactic, I must always actively pursue my objective as an actor, just was we do in real life. This distinction made the difference between an honest depiction and something closer to caricature. By focusing on accomplishing my tasks at hand, and not the obstacles in my way, I was able to create a more specific, truthful characterization of a man who lives by tireless endurance. Rather than putting my hand on the small of my back and grimacing as I sat to “show age” or “show pain,” I simply chose to sit slowly as the pain and tension demanded. I would look for something to lean on if it was available; if not, I would place my hand on a chair, crate or the floor so that I could ease myself down.

An integral aspect in my physical development of the role was the Alexander Technique (AT). Developed by F. M. Alexander, AT is an education and guidance system to improve posture and movement, and to use muscles more efficiently. The use and understanding of Primary Control was essential for me in this process:

Human beings can use their minds and engage their thinking to change their movement. Unlike most animals, we do not have to rely on our instincts to survive. Certainly we use our instincts, yet we go further and use our thinking to survive. In Alexander work, we can direct our thinking
to mobilize “primary control”. The consciousness of a habit is the first step, followed by inhibition, pausing a moment to undo the habit. Now the actor can proceed with a constructive thought process and choose to redirect his body (McEvenue 20).

Once I became aware of my own natural way of moving, I was able to deliberately adjust it for my portrayal of Casy, allowing me to further transform in my performance. To do so, it was important for me to be cognizant of the differences between Casy and myself in regards to how we operate in the world, as those differences would separate Casy’s unique physical life from my own.

It was important to note that Steinbeck paints Casy as a much stronger man than me. He never complains. He is going to sit, stand, walk, eat, and wash without making a “whole production” out of it; his pride won’t let him. Despite the infirmity, Casy would attempt to move with grace. This understanding gave a dignity to Casy that helped me further define his physical life. Although he is getting older and age is winning the battle over his body, he is still a man of inner strength. By choosing to hide his pain, my portrayal became ultimately more layered and uniquely separate from the actor playing him.

Whenever we had a five-minute break in rehearsal, I would take my shoes off and rub my feet in an effort to get a moment’s respite of soothing relief. One day, it occurred to me that Casy might do the same thing, so I chose to start doing it in scene work. The director immediately loved it and asked me to keep exploring it in other scenes. It would turn out to be an ongoing activity for me in the production, adding another “real life” detail to a production built on authenticity. It also led to another unscripted, “real life”
moment in the production. I chose to have a hole in my right sock, which was revealed every time I took off my right shoe, until finally I decided to mend the hole with a needle and thread. This allowed an audience to see Casy in a private moment, doing a simple task. One of my goals as an actor is to allow myself to live privately on stage. My belief is that it enhances my performance, rooting it in a sense of daily life. My hope is that an audience is so piqued by it as to wonder about the story behind the moment. Was the hole starting to irritate him to the point of taking action? Had he recently traded for the needle and thread? This small detail added depth to Casy’s individual story, revealing him as a self-reliant man who could take care of his own needs, and further bolstered the authenticity of my stage life. It was a simple bit of action, but it had the potential to specify the world of the play and speak volumes about the character.

In time, finding Casy’s “physical center” became a major focus for me in rehearsal. A character’s physical center or, as Michael Chekhov called it, “Imaginary Center” is the part of the body from which all movements and ideas emanate. This physical center may be obvious to a viewer and be quite literal. For example, an actor playing Einstein might lead with his head. It may also be something that the audience recognizes subconsciously, like an actor playing Einstein and leading with his groin. Physical centers are closely linked to cultural archetypes from which much information about a character is implied. I believe that if an actor can find a physical center that suits the role he is playing, an audience will empathize with him because they feel as if they already know him; there will be an instant connection that comes through recognition. To find a character’s center, one must determine the motivations behind the character’s behavior; why this individual does what he does and for what purpose. One must ask:
what leads him? To find Casy’s center, I re-examined what Casy wants (his objectives) and leads him throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Casy remarks, “I gotta see them folks that’s gone out on the road. I gotta feelin’ I got to see them. They gonna need help no preachin’ can give ‘em. Hope of heaven when their lives ain’t lived. Holy Sperit when their own sperit is downcast an’ sad” (Steinbeck 94). Casy wishes to reach out to others in spite of his own troubles. He wants to give them hope and rejuvenate their souls. He believes that everyone is created equal. He never utters a hurtful word to anyone, sacrificing his own welfare by picketing to raise the wages of other workers, and not faltering when he or his comrades are called derogatory names. Casy is forever grateful to the Joads for travelling with him and talks of paying them back several times. He says, “I wanna do what’s bes’ for you folks. You took me in, carried me along. I’ll do whatever” (Steinbeck 144). As Tom reminds us after his passing, Casy believes that we all have a small part of a larger universal soul, and everybody is holy. Throughout the story, Casy seems to want peace: for his loved ones; for the American people; for the land; and for himself. This selflessness emanates from his compassionate heart, the center from which his longing and actions spring. Using that image as inspiration, I played Casy with my upper chest thrust forward ever so slightly, as if leading from my “heart”. This discovery echoed a key element of Chekhov’s imaginary center, “The imaginary center gives the whole body a harmonious appearance because, being in the middle of the chest, it draws the character near to the ideal body (Chekhov 100). It was almost imperceptible, but it was enough to slow down my movements and prevent my arms from swinging too much when I walked, giving me a strong, but quiet presence. It enabled me to move with a light physical ease through a
world heavy with pain and suffering, making my Casy open-hearted and approachable, fitting qualities for a man whom the director called “the soul of the play.”

III. SOUL

One of the most important steps in my development in the role of Jim Casy was finding his “soul.” I had discovered how Casy walks and talks. I even determined what he wants out of his life. But it was not enough. I had to find the inner motivation behind what he wants—why he wants what he wants—to truly find who Casy is. I refer to this as “soul.” I believe that actors must make their characters come to life, and to do this, they must find the “souls” of the characters they play. Unlike my more “intellectual” methods of working in the early weeks of rehearsal, this exploration is more instinctual and personal. It takes place outside of the rehearsal hall, in the privacy of an empty studio. It is a technique I started to develop in 2001 at the Terry Schreiber Studio in New York City. I call it the Mirror Exercise. The Mirror Exercise consists of three main parts. The first part is self-discovery. The second part is character discovery. The third part is an amalgamation of the first two.

To begin my self-discovery, I stood alone in a room facing a full-length mirror. I was wearing my rehearsal clothes that consisted of a worn pair of grey slacks, a button down white shirt, a slightly tattered blazer and old lace-up leather shoes. I stood five feet from the mirror and looked at myself. I observed what I looked like. I spent many minutes simply looking at myself, and allowing myself to get comfortable with the image in front of me. I looked at the way my clothes hung on my body. I looked at the way my body was positioned. I looked at myself from head to toe and just took in what I saw.
made no judgments, just observations. When I was done taking inventory on my body, I
examined my face more closely. I tried to see what was familiar and what was different
from the image I saw of myself in my mind’s eye. When I finished this exploration of my
face, I looked deep into my own eyes and sought recognition of the man staring back at
me. As my comfort level grew, I approached the mirror so I was nose to nose with
myself. I strove to really see me, not the idea of me, but the real me; to see what I look
like and to understand that the person looking back from the mirror was me.

Once this was done, I went back to standing five feet from the mirror and closed
my eyes. While my eyes were closed, I thought of some of Casy’s lines. Eventually, I
started to repeat one of them again and again in my head, “A man got to do what he got
to do” (Galati 45). I then opened my eyes and looked in the mirror again. I said the line
out loud with Casy’s voice and repeated it in many different ways. I changed my pitch,
my stresses and my pace. I played different intentions with the line and searched for all of
its possible meanings. As I did this, I looked myself up and down again, and slowly I
started to “see” Jim Casy. The clothes I was wearing were Casy’s. The stance was
Casy’s, and the face staring back at me was Casy’s. I began to accept that Casy looks
exactly like Jason Weiss. As I approached the mirror and looked deep into the eyes of my
reflection, I could see the weariness in Casy. There was no actual physical change in me,
nor was there an attempt to make myself look different. There was simply a new
understanding. I was beginning to understand Casy by looking him directly in the eye. I
was no longer Jason looking at my idea of Casy, but Casy looking at himself. I don’t
mean to suggest that I literally believed that I was Jim Casy, but I accepted the man in
front of me as him. This is what I call “character discovery.”
After immersing myself in that for some time, I started the amalgamation process by walking about the room, all the time checking back in with the mirror. As I moved about the room, I explored the objects in it as Casy might explore them. I paused at objects that were of interest, like a large black upright piano. While the piano was an everyday object for me, it was an object of distinction for Casy. The touch and feel of it, the way it sounded when played, and even the smell of it conjured up images of childhood in the church. Were they my memories or imagined ones? The line between Casy and me was beginning to blur. The more I saw through Casy’s eyes, the more I realized they were also my eyes. I began to embrace the possibility that Casy and I could be one and the same.

When one reads *The Grapes of Wrath*, Jim Casy is only in the imagination of the reader; words on the page. But when I play the role, he becomes a living, breathing person because I am a living, breathing person. While I may not have faced certain situations that Casy does in the story (i.e., poverty, famine, isolation), I still have the capacity to intellectually understand them and to empathize with Jim. These, combined with my healthy imagination and willingness to be vulnerable, allow Casy’s soul to evolve from my own. The character comes into being from both my inner emotional understanding of Casy’s point of view and the physical form revealed in my vocal and physical explorations. Doing the Mirror Exercise is my way of developing a character from the inside out and outside in simultaneously. I continued to do my mirror exercise for the remainder of the rehearsal process. It eventually became part of my daily warm-up, and I discovered new details weekly.
I decided that we both like Delta Blues artists like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Leadbelly, Robert Johnson and Son House; their music is highly evocative, and I found it useful as an imaginative bridge to the world of the play, where people worked hard, suffered through the lean times, and gave thanks for what little they had. This kind of music would ultimately find its way into the opening of the play with me singing to the tune of “Yes, Sir, That’s My Baby” written in 1925 by Walter Donaldson and Gus Kahn:

Yes, sir, that’s my Savior
Je-sus is my savior
Je-sus is my savior now.
On the level
‘S not the devil
Jesus is my Savior now (Galati 9).

By adding a “blues” flavor to the scripted moment, I was able to incorporate one of my personal “discoveries” about Casy (his love of blues music) to make the moment more specific to my particular portrayal. While continuing my private work in front of the mirror and the script, I also discovered that we are similarly spiritual, and that, while we have conviction about our beliefs, we are both reluctant to make a public show of them. This reluctance fueled the scene when Casy is asked to say the blessing for the Joads, and replies, “If me jus’ bein’ glad to be here an’ bein’ thankful for people that’s kind and generous, if that’s enough – why, I’ll say that kinda grace” (Galati 21).

The Mirror Exercise usually lasts for 2 hours, and I did it 2 to 3 times a week. Each time, I delved further and further into my own emotional and psychological depths in order to find more depth in Casy. This can be quite taxing, but also extremely
rewarding. By bringing that outside work to rehearsal, my portrayal grew on a daily basis. It gave me the opportunity to present many character-driven choices to the director. For example, the script indicates that “Casy sits on the running board of the truck and plays ‘Amazing Grace’ on the harmonica” (Galati 24). I spent hours learning how to play the song on the harmonica, and the director liked the way it sounded. Then one day I was working on my own, and I was reminded of “Harmonica Blues” by Sonny Boy Williamson. I thought the song gave a better reflection of what was happening to the Joads at that moment. I spent a couple days learning the song, and then presented it to the director, who agreed with me, and we replaced the hymn with the lesser known, more appropriate blues song. This individual choice would not have been possible if I had not been doing character explorations outside of scheduled rehearsals. (On a side note, we ended up eliminating the harmonica in the final production because the director found that it pulled focus from the scene it was meant to merely underscore.)

My thorough preparation also allowed me to be “in the moment” with my fellow actors and to react specifically to what they did, because I was not using rehearsal time to learn my lines or do research, which plagued our rehearsal process. Many cast members relied on the repetition of rehearsals to learn their lines, and used our director as a living encyclopedia of the 1930’s. By not doing work outside of rehearsal, they limited the amount of exploration they could do in rehearsal. In many ways, great acting is only possible by allowing oneself to react. In his book True and False, David Mamet states, “On the stage…it is the progress of the outward-directed actor, who believes with no regard to his personal state, but with all regard for the responses of his antagonists, which thrills the viewers” (Mamet 13). In my efforts to create a living, compelling
performance, I freed myself of preconceived notions and line deliveries. Instead, I directed my focus on fellow actors to discover Casy’s behavior in relation to them. Being well-prepared, I was able to listen and react from moment to moment, creating a performance that was specific and spontaneous. Finding Casy’s “soul” in private work outside of rehearsal allowed me to act and react instinctually and confidently with my fellow actors, as my particular Casy would, rather than doubt or second-guess my choices. By the time we entered our technical rehearsals, with opening night just days away, I was ready to perform in front of an audience.

SELF EVALUATION: PERFORMANCE AND PROCESS

I. TECH WEEK AND OPENING NIGHT

Technical rehearsals, also called “tech week,” occur in the week prior to the opening night of a play in which all of the technical elements, such as sets, costumes, makeup, lights, and sound, are introduced to the rehearsal process. The purpose of tech week is to rehearse the show with all technical elements in place, allowing the actors to become familiar with the set and costumes, the technical production designers and crew to iron out unforeseen problems, and the director to see how everything works together as an artistic whole. My experience with this phase of rehearsals got off to a rocky start.

We began our tech week on Saturday, January 22, 2011 with two “12 out of 14” rehearsal days, meaning that on Saturday and Sunday, we were at the theatre for 14 hours, 10:00AM to 12:00AM, rehearsing for 12 of those hours with a two hour break. At first, I was upset with the schedule because my previous five shows at UF utilized the
professional theatre industry standard of “10 out of 12” rehearsal days during tech weekend; a schedule to which I was accustomed as a member of Actors Equity Association. This new and previously unannounced schedule was not something for which I was prepared. I tried in vain to get the schedule amended; professional theatre strictures do not apply to university theatre. So, I acquiesced and put my best foot forward. Sometimes an actor believes that the show is about him, and when this happens, tensions can run high, and morale can suffer. I did not want this to happen to me, so I took it as an opportunity to lead by example. The vast majority of the cast was grumbling about the long hours, and I was afraid that the repercussions of those grumblings could have catastrophic effects on the progress of the weekend. I took it upon myself to go in with a positive attitude with hopes that it would rub off on others. I spoke with some other senior members of the cast, and we all led by example. We arrived early, did our work, and maintained a sense of levity through the weekend. Tech week is essentially “rehearsal” for the designers and the back stage crew; we actors had 2 months to rehearse, but the designers and crew were given only a few days. When I looked at it from that point of view, the long hours became very easy to swallow and gave me a perspective that allowed for a productive rehearsal.

Our tech process was difficult because the set involved a lot of moving scenery, all of which had to be moved by actors. There were also many light and sound cues to coordinate within the production. On top of this, there was live music and special effects to incorporate as well. The culmination of which was a rainstorm on stage with actual water, which posed its own set of problems and slowed our progress through these final
days of rehearsal. Needless to say, we were all feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by the challenges of that weekend. Strength and focus were in short supply.

About an hour before our dinner break on Sunday January 23, one of the back wall units of the set, which weighed well over a ton, went out of alignment, and the cast and crew were asked to help re-align it. As we were pushing it back, my left hand slipped into one of the hinge points and was pinned there. Before I knew it, the wall was pushed back and the hinge closed on my hand. I called for everyone to stop pushing and to pull it back. When they did, I was able to remove my hand, but the damage had already been done. I could see a long indented line going across the back of my hand, and the pain was intense. At that point, I was taken outside and it was decided that I should go to the emergency room. After several x-rays and a thorough exam by a doctor, it was concluded that I had fractured two bones in my hand and had deep bruises on the muscles and tendons. The doctor gave me a removable splint that had to be worn at all times and released me with a prescription for pain medication.

I returned to rehearsal on Monday January 24, where I met with the director for about an hour to discuss what would have to be modified in the production due to my injury. I knew I would not be able to shovel dirt on Grampa’s grave, nor whittle (which was an activity I adopted for times of reflection for Casy). Interestingly, the absence of these two mundane activities would affect not only my stage life, but also the stage lives of other actors in this detailed production.

The director had “blocked” (staged) Grampa’s funeral scene so that Casy relieves Pa from the burden of digging his own father’s grave. This enabled Pa to talk to Ma and Tom across the stage and further the action of the play. The gesture also
demonstrated how Casy has become a solid fixture in the family circle, and allowed me to become physically tired so that when I was asked to pray over the grave, I would be weary, both spiritually and physically, which helped me play the rest of the scene. The actor playing Pa and I restaged the scene so that Casy offers to help dig, but Pa politely refuses and keeps digging with even greater fervor. This changed the “story” somewhat and affected the moments that followed for not only me but the others as well. However, this change gave birth to an equally compelling new moment that revealed the resilience of a man forced to bury his father alongside a road, far from home. The trade-off satisfied the director, and it became part of the production.

I used whittling on stage in times of reflection for Casy. The activity seemed right for this “soul searcher”, leading me to a quiet private place conducive for deep thought. When I could no longer physically do this, I was at a loss as to how to get to that place. I chose to simply sit and contemplate as Casy, looking off into the distance above the audience’s heads, using my imaginary surroundings to fuel my thinking. This provided me the same tranquility I found whittling. It also gave the audience a chance to see my eyes in a way that whittling did not, allowing them an opportunity to “read” Casy’s thoughts and learn a little more about this enigmatic man, quietly sitting, pondering the universe. The simplicity spoke volumes through its silence.

My injury reinforced a valuable acting lesson. Just as a character must overcome an obstacle in pursuit of an objective, so must actors. Things go wrong on stage and actors must think quickly and improvise to cover the gaffe. Other times, things happen prior to performance, like my injury, and the cast must come together as an ensemble to
discover a way to fix the problem. This was especially true when restaging the
choreographed violence in the production of which I was a part.

In addition to my duties as an actor, I was also production fight director for *The
Grapes of Wrath*. I, with the consultation of Dr. Mitchell and Professor Tiza Garland,
designed and choreographed all of the violence on stage. Most of this violence was not
affected by my injury; however, there was a staged moment toward the end of the play
that had to be modified. In the story, a blow to the head kills Casy. His death is pivotal.
It is the trigger that spurs Tom to kill Casy’s assailant, forcing him to flee as a fugitive.
Therefore, it was imperative that Casy’s death remain brutal and dramatic. As staged, I
was to fall to the ground with the illusion of dead weight. This involved a quick turn of
the head from left to right, followed by an incremental collapse of my body. In order to
fall safely without my injured hand hitting the ground while maintaining the integrity of
the violence, I chose to collapse onto my right side with my right calf hitting the floor
first, followed by my right thigh, right Gluteus Maximus, and right Latissimus Dorsi,
finally rolling onto the flat of my back. All of this was done rather quickly to feed the
illusion of “dead weight”. Then, to “sell” the collapse, as my right arm was about to land,
I slapped the stage with the lower side of my closed right fist to make a sound like my
head hitting the ground. I took care to keep my injured left arm elevated when I fell and
made certain that it landed across my chest rather than the stage. This modification made
the fall both safe and effective; a solution that came out of 16 years of stage combat
experience behind me and a willingness on the part of cast and consultants to help solve a
problem.
The only other problem my injury caused, aside from putting me in a considerable amount of pain, was that my splint was bright blue and wouldn’t fit under my costume. To combat this, the costume designer, Rebecca Wallace, designed a sleeve to put over the splint that looked like a cast from the 1930’s. Our idea was to incorporate the injury into the character’s life rather than try to hide it from the audience. As an actor, I had to ask myself: what would Casy do if he had two fractured bones in his left hand? The answer was simple; as he does with all his hardships, he would deal with it and forge ahead. After the artificial cast was built, it was a simple matter of letting out the seam on the left cuff of my jacket so that my bandaged arm could fit through the sleeve. With that, another problem was solved, and the show went on.

Warming up is an important step in my preparation to go on stage each night. During dress rehearsals, I solidified my warm up routine. I started my warm up one hour before the “call for places” (start of the performance). Wearing my costume and stage make up, I went into a large dance studio adjacent to the theatre. It had a wall of mirrors and a sound system with which to play music. I began my warm up by stretching and relaxing my body, starting from the top of my head and working my way down to my waist. Then I started from my feet and worked my way back up to my waist. When I finished my physical warm up, which usually lasted about 20 minutes, I began a vocal warm up. My vocal warm up primarily consisted of Lessac vocal technique exercises. I started by vocalizing the “EE” sound, exploring the depths and heights of my range, attempting to keep the sound full and rich at both ends of my vocal range. From the “EE” sound I went into an “AY,” followed by “OH.” I explored these vowels the same way I explored “EE,” focusing on vocal fullness and richness. After that, I drilled all of the
consonants in the alphabet, one after the other: “BaBaBaBaBa, CaCaCaCaCa, DaDaDaDaDa…” and so on. The purpose was to loosen my facial and throat muscles and to prime and activate my vocal instrument for the performance. This usually lasted another 20 minutes.

When I finished, I headed to the stage for “fight call.” Fight call is when all of the actors involved in stage violence meet prior to performance to run through the fights to keep them in good performance shape and maintain safety. As fight director, I led the calls. My fight calls were a three-step process, where the actor combatants first literally walked through their fights while saying their actions aloud, e.g., “I walk up to the sheriff and I kick him in the stomach.” This step is commonly called a “Tech Talk.” This assured that their physical movements and intellectual understanding were in tune. They then ran their fights at half-speed, to ensure proper form, control and intention. Finally, they ran their fights at \( \frac{3}{4} \) speed, which was “performance” speed. I avoided using the term “full speed” as I found it detrimental to the fights and the combatants. If a fight happens too quickly, the audience cannot follow it closely and is distanced from it. Also, actors’ adrenaline in performance has a tendency to add speed to fights. A fight running faster than “full speed” runs the great risk of becoming unsafe. Running fights at \( \frac{3}{4} \) speed seemed to safeguard against such missteps. When it was my turn to fight, I assigned three fighters to watch, telling them exactly what to look for. They watched me from the right, center and left of the house (audience) and reported from their vantage points. I used their observations to adjust any of my moves. By the end of each fight call, all of the actor combatants had reviewed their fights and knew that they were safe. Once
fight call was over, I dismissed the actors and returned to the dance studio to continue my warm up.

The remaining 20 minutes of my warm up consisted of listening to music and doing an abbreviated version of the Mirror Exercise. The music was the same every night. The first two songs were “Come on Up to the House” and “Bottom of the World” by Tom Waits, followed by “Badlands” by Bruce Springsteen. The final song was “Goin’ Out West” also by Tom Waits. I create a music list for every show I do, songs that somehow speak to me as both actor and character and “prepare” me for my performance. These four particular songs spoke in some way about Casy’s life and plight. The first song is a call to come back to the church (God’s “house”), while the second is about a man who is stuck at “the bottom of the world.” These are both part of Casy’s story. “Badlands” speaks of the hardships of people who work the land, which are at the heart of The Grapes of Wrath. The final song is full of bravado and anger with a driving beat that pumped up my adrenaline and filled me with verve for the journey “west” I took each night.

I looked into the mirror as the music played, and as Casy began to “appear” before me, I would start to walk about the room. I would allow the music to move me. If I felt like singing, I would sing. If I felt like saying some of Casy’s lines, I would say them. Sometimes, I danced. Other times, I would improvise as Casy and deliver a sermon or give advice or ask questions to others in my imagination. When I was in high school, I heard an interview with Jimi Hendrix. In it, he said, “It would be incredible if you could produce music so perfect that it would filter through like rays and ultimately cure.” That is what I set out to do with this warm-up. I allowed the music to infiltrate me, and
penetrate the places that I hide from public view. This sometimes brought emotions to the surface, and I welcomed them. I strove to release control and simply react to the music. The inevitable outcome of this was movement, and the movement invigorated me. I danced like nobody was watching me; without thought or judgment. This enabled me to be free physically. The music and the movement were the catalysts, opening me up and reconnecting me with Casy. I did this every day from our first dress rehearsal until closing night; and each night, when the final song was over, I would turn off the sound system, gather my personal props and head to my place backstage for the top of the play, ready to begin my journey.

On the night of our opening, Friday, January 28, 2011, I was in good spirits and excited to perform the role. I knew that the play was going to be a tough sell to some of the younger students in attendance due to its length and theme, but I was confident that the subject matter would hit home for many. In the end, I believe our opening night was successful. We did not have any technical difficulties, and the audience was quite responsive. My injury was not a distraction, and in some ways, helped my portrayal. It became easier to play the weariness and pain of being on the open road for so many years because I was in actual pain myself. I had to slow down some of my actions and be quite deliberate with others in order to prevent myself from further injuring my hand. I found that performing with all of the design aspects in play deepened my work. The colors and textures of the set pieces and props stirred a feeling inside of me that slowed my internal rhythms. I don’t quite know how to describe it, but I found inspiration from the color scheme. The earthiness of the set made me want to return to it; to come “home” to the it,
to feel the hard, dry dirt under my feet, to smell the rot of old wood. My whole senses were engaged by the set and the suggestions it made to me.

Opening night was the first time we had an audience and I found them to be a comfort for me; I was able to feed off of them. I found myself moving with a great amount of ease on the stage despite the fact that I was in a certain amount of physical discomfort. It always amazes to me how an audience can bring out my truest acting. I always feel safer in a theatre full of strangers than I do in a room with close friends. It is easier for me to take risks in that environment. I used this audience as a type of “flock” for my speeches. I did not speak directly to them, but, at times, gave them the impression that I was. Casy’s message is not just a message for the Joads, it’s a message for the masses. The audience, in effect, served as “the masses.” By keeping the audience in my mind as I counseled and led those within the story, it added a depth and gravity to Casy and his greater function in the play that could not have been there without them.

II. LESSONS FROM THE RUN

During the 10-performance run of *The Grapes of Wrath*, I practiced what I preach. I have strong opinions about what it is to be an actor and the acting craft, and I maintained my performance standards throughout. I was older than the vast majority of the actors in the production, and had more professional acting experience than all of them combined; therefore, I felt that I needed to lead by example. Whether I liked it or not, I was a role model for many of the actors in that show, both graduate and undergraduate, and I accepted that mantle and understood the great responsibility it held. I conducted myself in a professional manner both on and off the stage and did everything I could to
support the production, its cast, crew, and design staff. There were a few actors in the production that did not share my enthusiasm, and I was determined to keep any dissention from rising to the surface. Keeping it “light with an air of seriousness” became my goal.

On Tuesday January 25, 2011, we were informed by management that we had lost our green room privileges. The “green room” is a courtesy space in a theatre that accommodates performers who are not on stage at a given time, much like a waiting room. Many of the cast members ate and drank in the room (which was prohibited) and left the remains of their garbage in the room for management to clean up. We received several warnings about the violations, but the behavior continued throughout tech weekend. When we were informed that privileges had been revoked, many of the cast were up in arms and argued that this action was not fair. Sensing a potential morale issue, I took it upon myself to call a meeting of the entire cast and told them in no uncertain terms that what we had done was unprofessional and disgraceful. Although it seemed like a case of some bad apples spoiling the bunch, I explained that we were an ensemble and only as strong as our weakest link. I urged us to collectively make amends with management, with whom we then met. As spokesman, I apologized for our behavior. I assured them that we would police ourselves and that I would take personal responsibility to make certain the green room was clean before I left the theatre each night. At this, the decision was reversed and we were allowed back in the green room. My willingness to lead professionally and with good will brought the dispute quickly and harmlessly to an end, maintaining the good morale necessary for a successful run.
By the 4th performance, which was on Tuesday, January 31st, I decided to perform without my splint. I spoke to my doctor and director, and I was confident that I would not further injure myself, nor impede my performance. Removing the splint allowed me to go back to some of my original stage “business.” I could shovel dirt on Grampa’s grave again, as well as whittle. I could also dip both hands in the “river” to wash my face, instead of just one. When reintroduced, these actions became even richer as I got to experience them anew. Also, these activities were informed by discoveries I had made in their absence. They infused new life in me as Casy and the role became all the more fun to play.

We rehearsed *The Grapes of Wrath* from November 6th, 2010 until January 27th, 2011, but only performed the play 10 times, which was a bit anticlimactic for me. Coming from the professional theatre world, I am more accustomed to a rehearsal-to-performance ratio that is more heavily weighted on the performance end, allowing more time for a production’s growth in front of an audience. Rehearsing for 2 ½ months was strenuous for me, and at times I was at my wit’s end. The frustration stemmed not from the length of the rehearsal period per se, but from erratic scheduling and the lack of concentration and focus of some of my fellow cast members throughout the process. Nevertheless, “the show must go on,” and even though circumstances were not ideal, we still managed to get the work done. I learned the value of taking a deep breath and using patience to combat my frustration. By doing so, I was able to maintain my nerves and not allow challenges to cause me stress, and, in some instances, I was even able to use that frustration in my acting work.
There is an old saying in the theatre that goes, “If you can’t lose it, use it.” I was working on a scene where Tom and Casy get into a small dispute about what is waiting for them in California. The director kept asking me to be more confrontational, but not aggressively so. Initially, I had a difficult time making the distinction between the two. What I would eventually realize is that Casy is not angry at Tom, nor is he attacking Tom, but merely frustrated over a situation that is beyond his control. This is very similar to how I was feeling about our rehearsals; I also was frustrated by so many factors out of my control. Finally, I understood the scene and was able to use that frustration from my own life in the scene with the actor playing Tom. It was a strong reminder to the actor that art reflects life.

Our truncated performance schedule notwithstanding, the experience was still fruitful. I enjoyed the time I spent with the cast, both on stage and off, and found that living in Casy’s shoes for three hours a night, while painful, was inspiring at the same time. He is a man who says and does things that I often think of saying and doing, but never actually do. My hope is that having played that conviction on stage, I can emulate it in my daily life.

III. EVALUATION OF MY PROCESS

I felt a distinct and satisfying sense of accomplishment after playing Jim Casy. My acting work is an extension of myself, and in my endeavor to entertain an audience, I allow my innermost self to become public. As Jim Casy, I was able to access parts of myself on stage, in front of family, friends and strangers, that I’m not comfortable
sharing in my everyday life. The sense of fulfillment that comes from this is enormous, and when it is augmented by the accolades, it becomes immeasurable.

I received a favorable review in *The Gainesville Sun*: “A notable performance is also obtained by Jason Weiss as Jim Casy, who is relied upon to provide spiritual comfort to the family despite his status as a lapsed preacher” (Maxwell 20). I also received high praise from Sybil St. Clair, an adjudicator from the American College Theatre Festival, who singled me out as “the most dynamic and interesting character in the production.” However, the most appreciated feedback I got was from my parents, Dr. & Mrs. Alan and Marie Weiss. Their sense of parental pride in my performance warmed my heart. They have supported my career choices since I was 18 years old. Seeing them in the lobby after the opening night show and hearing their praise was the “icing on the cake.”

Looking at the performance from my own point of view, I can honestly say that I accomplished everything I set out to do. I created a three dimensional character who was both interesting and believable. I explored the inner and outer life of Casy, and I successfully brought him to life on stage. But perhaps more surprisingly, I found a way to enjoy and learn from the process every step of the way. While there were some pitfalls, each provided me with a learning experience. There are times when learning what *not* to do can be just as valuable as learning what *to* do; such were the lessons in *The Grapes of Wrath*. By swallowing my pride and finding patience, I was able to best serve the production. I can say without hesitation that I put the production’s success above my own; I cannot say that is true for every experience I’ve had in my career. The many hours I worked outside of the rehearsal room were not intended to raise my performance above all others, but to add to the richness of the production. I put an enormous amount of effort
into this role because that is what the role called for and deserved. Anything less would have been a disservice to me, the play, the novel, and the School of Theatre and Dance. I took this role knowing that it would be difficult and time consuming. I knew I would have to give it 100%. It pleases me to look back on the process and see that I did just that, as both a leader and a team player.

CONCLUSION

During my time at The University of Florida, a few of my professors have urged me to take more risks in my work, saying that I too often play characters that resemble me. Playing Jim Casy gave me an opportunity to address that challenge. While I might agree with some of his ideas, Casy and I are distinctly different from one another. In speaking to those same professors post-show, I was encouraged to hear that they saw a “different” Jason as Casy and that I had fulfilled their expectations. Such approval affirms my way of working. Perhaps the most important thing I learned throughout the process of The Grapes of Wrath is that the acting technique I have been developing for the past 10 years (and solidifying over the last 3 years at The University of Florida) is not only useful for me, but has the potential of becoming a system that I can teach to others.

My interests do not lie in acting alone, but also in teaching. I would like to formally devise an explicit system of acting that can be applied to both stage and film work. In my view, good acting is good acting; if one is a great stage actor, he has the ability to be a great screen actor as well. I believe that my performance in The Grapes of Wrath was solid and, from the feedback I received, it was decipherable to the back row of the theatre. I also believe that my choices were detailed enough that, with a small amount
of modification, could easily suit the minute demands of film acting. This resulting confidence inspires me to put some of my ideas on paper to see where they may lead.

As they say, “It is not the destination, but the journey.” And while it was a long journey for me to *The Grapes of Wrath*, it was a rewarding one. I encountered many obstacles and detours, some good days and some bad along the way, but the journey was well worth it. It helped prepare me for the journey that awaits me. Like Casy and the Joads, I am about to pack my belongings in a truck and move to the promised land of California in search of my own dreams. While I have stars in my eyes, I am well aware that the odds are heavily stacked against me. Yet despite them, I am compelled to go. Just like Casy says, “I knew it. I knew it so deep down in my soul that it was true, and I still know it.” (Galati 12). If I can take anything from my time playing Casy, it must be to trust and follow the feelings that lie deep down in my soul.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


John Steinbeck's

The Grapes of Wrath

Adapted by Frank Galati
Directed by Charlie Mitchell

Featuring
Live Performances by
Tony Shed & Olga Godula

Scenic Design
Molly Ilten

Costume Design
Rebecca Wallace

Sound Design
Gerard Hale III

Lighting Design
Timothy Reed

Stage Manager
Martina Harte

There will be one 10 minute intermission

The use of photography or video is strictly prohibited.
Cell phones and text messaging are not permitted.

* Project in lieu of thesis in partial fulfillment of the
  Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre.
# Denotes work in partial fulfillment of BFA Senior Project
CAST of CHARACTERS

Grandma Joad
Grandpa Joad
Ma Joad
Pa Joad
Uncle John
Noah Joad
Tom Joad
Al Joad
Rose of Sharon
Connie
Ruthie Joad
Winfield Joad
Jim Casy
Muley Graves / Floyd Knowles
Proprietor / Deputy Sheriff / Ensemble
Man Going Back / Hooverville Officer / Ensemble
Elizabeth Sandry
Narrator / Ensemble
Mrs. Wainwright / Narrator / Ensemble
Aggie Wainwright / Ensemble
Al’s Girl / Ensemble
Willy / Gas Station Attendant / Man on Strike / Ensemble
Gas Station Owner / Government Camp Director / Ensemble
First Agricultural Officer / Ranch Bookkeeper / Narrator / Ensemble
Mayor of Hooverville / Man on Strike/ Ensemble
Second Agricultural Officer / Narrator/ Ranch Guard/ Ensemble
Contractor / Ranch Guard / Man in Barn / Ensemble
Boy in Barn
Narrator / Ensemble
Ensemble
Ensemble
Ensemble
Ensemble
Ensemble

TIME
The Great Depression of the 1930s

PLACE
From the "Dust Bowl" prairies of Oklahoma to the Promised Land of California

Candace Clift*
Kevin Marshall
Alaina Manchester
Andrew Bailes
Joshua Hamilton
Robert 'Robin' Martinez
Adam Kroeger
Justin Ritchey*
Angie Petty*
Nick Erkelens
Megan Hess
Effis Cunningham
Jason Weiss*
Andrew Herrera
Colin Hudson
Cristian Gonzalez
Amelia Harris
Lauren McPherson
Katie Pankow
Katie Lee
Emilyann Offutt
Paul Sabayrac
Chase Milner
Ryan Weiss
Matt Mercurio
Kenny Frechette
Joseph Utick
Winston Cunningham
Andrea Erkelens
Cree Armstead
Natalie Rollan
Meghan Wolfe
Jack Polefko
Paulina Oswald
DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Stop me if this sounds familiar: a banking crisis fueled by speculation and greed leads to an economic collapse and the government seems helpless in the face of massive unemployment. Jobs are outsourced to the cheapest labor possible and a "race to the bottom" ensues for workers. At the same time, subsidies are given to the wealthy and big business but when public money is earmarked to help the public, violent accusations of socialism are heard. California, formerly a model of progressive thought and abundance, becomes known for intolerance and social problems. This was the Great Depression of the 1930s, one of the darkest times in our young country's history.

While the country was still reeling from the possibility that America might fail, more disaster loomed in the Plains states such as Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. Extended drought and high winds killed crops and erosion turned a foot of topsoil to dust. Soon, static electricity created a magnet, gathering dust into enormous storms that ripped across the land, burying farms, killing cattle, and destroying wells. Once harvest and hope had disappeared, between 1935 and 1940, over one million Americans left their homes in this "dust bowl" and traveled to California lured by promises of work. Proud Oklahoma farmers became "Okies," occupying the lowest rung of the social order and treated with disdain.

John Steinbeck, who had grown up in California and worked in its fields, wandered the country during this time and with a journalist's eye, recorded what he saw on the roads and camps in the now-classic prose of The Grapes of Wrath. Although the title of the novel was inspired by the biblical lyrics of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," the image was explored in the book with a passage describing the business practices of California growers. Anxious to protect their profits and maintain prices, many growers hired armed guards to patrol large corporate farms where crops were destroyed or left to rot as starving people watched from ditches alongside the road. Most cruel, however, was the practice of spraying kerosene on oranges to repel the desperate. Steinbeck wrote:

There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success....in the eyes of the people there is a failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

Yet the book and this theatrical adaptation do not stand as a story about politics; this is the story of a family lost in politics, blown by winds and circumstance, struggling to hold on to family and humanity. It is a struggle that I hope will inspire and, as I believe Steinbeck hoped, move us to look after our fellow man through collective action.

- Charlie Mitchell
MEET THE CAST

Cree Armstead (Ensemble) is graduating this spring with a Theatre major and a Dance minor. She is thrilled to be a part of the *The Grapes of Wrath* cast and would like to thank God for opening the doors, Dr. Mitchell for giving her the opportunity and her family for driving 9 hours to watch her. Thanks to everyone who is coming, enjoy the show!

Andrew Bailes (Pa Joad) is a second year MFA Acting candidate. Previous UF credits include: Streamers (Billy), In the Blood (Doctor), and Noises Off! (Garry). Later this semester, Andrew is directing Neil LaBute’s BASH for Florida Players as well as staging his original play Shotgun Party for the New Works Festival.

Candace Clift (Grandma Joad) is a third year MFA candidate. UF credits: A Streetcar Named Desire (Blanche – UF & International Production in Germany and the Czech Republic), Oedipus Rex (Chorus), Pride and Prejudice (Mrs. Bennet) and George Washington’s Boy (Martha Washington).

Ellis Cunningham (Winfield Joad) is pumped to appear in his first play at UF. He is in 8th grade at PK Yonge and has appeared in many shows at school and in the community. Ellis is a member of the school’s Varsity Dive Team and recently ranked 26th in the state. Thank you to the cast and Dr. Mitchell for being so welcoming to the noob. REAL!

Winston Cunningham (Boy in Barn / Ensemble) is downright giddy to appear in his first play at UF. He first fell in love with theatre with PK Yonge’s Les Misérables (Gavroche). Since then he has appeared in many shows at school and in the community. Winston is a member of the school’s Varsity Swim Team and loves political satire. Thanks to Dr. Mitchell and Ms. Martina (again) for giving him this opportunity.

Andrea Erkelens (Narrator / Ensemble) is a second year Theatre BA student and is ecstatic to be making her UF debut! She’s lucky to start off with such a talented cast and crew, including her brother, who started it all. Thanks to her family and friends for all the support and love.

Nick Erkelens (Connie Rivers) is a BFA Acting candidate. He was last seen as Eduardo in *The Caban Swimmer* at Santa Fe. This is his first production at UF and couldn’t be more excited to work with such an amazing cast and crew. He would like to thank his family and friends for their love and support.

Kenneth Frechette (2nd Agricultural Officer / Narrator / Ranch Guard / Ensemble) is happy to be performing in his second UF mainstage production, the first being *City of Angels* this past fall. He is honored to work with such a diverse and talented cast, and thanks Charlie Mitchell for this opportunity. Much love to my family.

Cristian Gonzalez (Man Going Back / Hooverville Officer / Ensemble) is a 3rd year BFA Acting candidate. He would like to thank the cast and crew for an awesome experience, Dr. Mitchell for bringing him aboard this epic project, and Caitlin, for supporting him in all his endeavors.

Joshua Hamilton (Uncle John Joad) is extremely grateful and excited to be making his debut here at UF in *The Grapes of Wrath*. A first year MFA acting candidate, Joshua earned his BA in Theatre at the wonderful Quirk Theatre of Eastern Michigan University. Thanks to my family.
Amelia Harris (Elizabeth Sandry) is a second year MFA candidate. Recent credits include A Christmas Carol (Mrs. Dilber), Noises Off! (Dotty Otley/Mrs. Clackett), In The Blood (Amiga Gringa), and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (Player). She would like to thank Dr. Mitchell for allowing her to discover and for making her listen.

Andrew Herrera (Muley Graves / Floyd Knowles) is a first year MFA Acting candidate. Andrew recently graduated from Clemson University where he received a BA. Some of his favorite past roles include: The Importance of Being Earnest (Jack Worthing), Blood Wedding (Leonardo), The Foreigner (Ellard), and Self Destruction Opera (Jerald/ Detective Moon).

Megan Hess (Ruthie Joad) is the tallest fifth grader at Gainesville Country Day School. She absolutely loves playing on the volleyball team, running, and hanging out with family and friends. She would like to thank God for blessing her with all her talents, her family and friends for all their support, and Charlie Mitchell for all of his help and patience. Philippians 4:13

Colin Hudson (Proprietor / Deputy Sheriff / Ensemble) is happy to be making his second appearance in a UF SOTD production, having previously been featured in Dark Play (Ensemble). He would like to thank Charlie for the chance, his friends for the fun, and his Mom for everything in between.

Adam Kroeger (Tom Joad) is a first year MFA candidate, hailing all the way from Idaho. I'm absolutely thrilled and humbled to have the opportunity to perform such an incredible role in this piece with this amazing cast and director.

Katie Lee (Aggie Wainwright / Ensemble) is a senior BFA and is thrilled to work with this great cast and crew! Most recently Katie was seen in The Women (Miriam) and has also been working on several independent film projects. She would like to thank Charlie for this opportunity, her beautiful friends and her boyfriend for everything they do to keep me sane.

Alaina Manchester (Ma Joad) is a second year MFA candidate. She is so proud to tell such an important story. She is thankful for her family for grounding her and Justin for always urging her to soar.

Kevin Marshall (Grandpa Joad) is Director of the Center for Arts and Public Policy at the University of Florida. For 12 years he was Director of the University of Florida's School of Theatre and Dance. Mr. Marshall is enjoying his return to the stage as an actor and to the classroom as a teacher.

Robert "Robin" Martinez (Noah Joad) is a third year theatre major focusing on stage direction. He last directed ART for Florida Players fall season. He would like to thank Charlie for the opportunity to play such a wonderful character, his cast mates, mother, sisters, and friends. Vi Veri Vniresum Vivas Vici.

Lauren McPherson (Narrator / Ensemble) is making her UF SOTD stage debut.

Matt Mercurio (Mayor of Hooveville / Man on Strike/ Ensemble) thanks Dr. Mitchell for the opportunity, his family for their many sacrifices & support, Christina for filling his life with love and laughter, and God for an infinite amount of things. Matt hopes you continue supporting theatre & all types of art everywhere.
Chase Milner (Gas Station Owner / Government Camp Director / Ensemble) is a BFA student, in his Junior Year. He has been involved in previous productions at the University such as The Rocky Horror Show, Damn Yankees, and Oedipus the King. He has enjoyed working with the cast and crew for the production of The Grapes of Wrath and is thankful for all their help.

Emilynn Offutt (Ali's Girl / Ensemble) is a recent addition to the BFA Acting program and is excited to appear in her first UF production. In the community, her most recent involvement in the arts includes work with Star Centre Children's Theatre, Gainesville Creative Kids, and the High Springs Community Theatre.

Paulina Oswald (Ensemble) has appeared in many dramas and musicals in the Gainesville area, most recently in The Crucible at P.K. Yonge. She also appeared in the short film The Last Shot, and in a Public Service Announcement. Paulina is in the Performing Arts program at P.K. Yonge, and plays the saxophone.

Katie Pankow (Mrs. Wainwright / Narrator / Ensemble) is a first year MFA candidate. She received a BA in English from Florida Gulf Coast University, and is honored and thrilled to now be studying her true passion-acting. Thanks and love to all who pushed me, supported me, and helped me to get here.

Angie Petty (Rose of Sharon Rivers Joad) graduated this past December with a BFA acting degree, and is so excited to be on UF's main stage for the Spring semester! She previously appeared in UF's summer production of Noises Off (Brook/Vicki). She would like to thank Dr. Charlie Mitchell and the whole cast and crew for the opportunity, support, making the process so much fun, and helping to really put the emotion into it! She'd also like to thank her family, friends, and loved ones for always believing in her. "143!"

Jack Polefko (Ensemble) began acting 2 years ago when he performed in Ragtime (Edgar). Since then he has played several roles including To Kill a Mockingbird (Jem) at GCP. He is excited about being in Hairspray at P.K. Yonge this March. He thanks Dr. Mitchell for this great opportunity!

Justin Ritchey (Al Joad) is a 4th-year BFA acting major and fisheries minor; simply put, if he's not acting, he's fishing. Previous productions include: Reasons to be Pretty and Oedipus the King. Justin sends love to his family, his wonderful woman Chelsie, and the entire SoTD faculty. Oh, two words: THUG LIFE. -Sperber/Sabayrac

Natalie Rollan (Ensemble) is a sophomore psychology major. The Grapes of Wrath is her first production with the School of Theatre and Dance and she is incredibly grateful to be part of such a wonderful production. She would like to thank Dr. Mitchell, the cast, and the crew for making this experience so fun and meaningful.

Paul Sabayrac (Willy / Gas Station Attendant / Man on Strike / Ensemble) is thrilled to be a part of his first SoTD production. He would like to thank Dr. Mitchell for the opportunity, the cast and crew for the invaluable lessons learned, and his family for their undying support.

Joseph Urick (Contractor / Ranch Guard / Man in Barn / Ensemble) is a first year MFA candidate. Joseph holds a BA in Acting/Directing from Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi (Summa Cum Laude). Joseph is a two time Irene Ryan Regional Finalist, winner of the Texas Educational Theatre Association's Founder Award, and the runner up for the David Shelton Playwriting Award from KC/ACTF.
Jason Weiss (Jim Casey): UF: Oedipus Rex, The Clean House, How I Learned To Drive, Pride & Prejudice, Cloud Nine. Hippodrome: Dracula, Boeing Boeing, Defiance. Florida Players: Fool For Love (Director) Off-Broadway; Francis Ford Coppola’s The Conversation (29th Street Rep), ... And Counting (2nd Stage), The Big Funk (Greenwich Street Theatre), The Homecoming (Cherry Lane), The Burial at Thebes (La MaMa Etc). Regional: Othello (Virginia Shakespeare Festival), King Lear, Romeo & Juliet, As You Like It, The Winter’s Tale (Princeton Rep), Bilkari Blues (Flat Rock Playhouse). FILM: The Book of Me, Shipwreck: USS Squalus, Nina. TV: 3 Years on ABC’s One Life to Live, All My Children, Crib Crashers. Jason is a 3rd year MFA student and a proud member of AEA, SAG, AFTRA.

Ryan Weiss (First Agricultural Officer / Ranch Bookkeeper / Narrator / Ensemble) is a second year Criminology major, performing in his second UF SOTD show. Favorite credits include: Tommy (Captain Walker), Songs for a New World (Man 2), Death of a Salesman (Willy Loman), Pippin (King Charles). Ryan would like to thank Dr. Mitchell and the entire cast and crew for a great show!

Meghan Elizabeth Wolfe (Ensemble) is a 7th grader in the Performing Arts Program at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School at the University of Florida. Meghan is a member of the National Junior Honor Society and the PK Yonge Swim team. She enjoys singing, acting, dancing, drawing, writing, and playing the oboe and piano.
MEET THE PRODUCTION CREW

Dr. Charlie Mitchell (Director) has directed and acted in a variety of theatres in New York City, Chicago, and Baltimore. After completing his BFA training at Ithaca College, he studied playwriting with Nobel prize-winning author Derek Walcott at Boston University and later earned a PhD from the University of Colorado at Boulder. For three years, Dr. Mitchell was an artistic associate and company member of the award-winning Chesapeake Shakespeare Company. He has directed over twenty productions including last year’s UF production of In the Blood. Credits include Epic Proportions, A Flea in Her Ear, How I Learned To Drive, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Cabaret, The Marriage of Bette and Boo, City of Angels, Under Milk Wood, Oleanna, and Wayzgeek. Dr. Mitchell would like to thank his tremendous design team and technical staff for their imagination and dedication. As for the cast, never has he seen so much talent assembled in one place.

Molly Ilten (Scenic Designer) holds a BS in Mechanical Engineering and is working towards her MFA in Scenic Design. Past UF productions include City of Angels, In the Blood, and Agbedidi. She has also worked at Flatrock Playhouse and Wagon Wheel Theatre as their scenic charge artist.

Tim Reed (Lighting Designer) received his BA from Weber State University for Musical Theatre Performance and Design and is currently a first year MFA student in the Lighting Design area here at University of Florida. He has designed lights over the past eight years in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, and California. Timothy has won the national KCAC/TF awards for Lighting Design and Stage Management, and looks forward to a BRIGHT future.

Rebecca Wallace (Costume Designer) is honored to be trusted with such an immense show for her senior project. A BFA Costume Designer, previous design credits include Hair, The Bay at Nice, the 2010 New Works Festival (all Florida Players), Iphigenia and Other Daughters, and three pieces in the 2010 Fall BFA Dance Showcase. Assistant credits: Damn Yankees (UFSoTD) and The Rocky Horror Show (UFSoTD). Thanks to her professors for the opportunity, Martina for being the best SM ever, and her family and boyfriend David for the perennial love, support, and sanity they provide.

Gerard Hale (Sound Designer) is a graduating BFA lighting design student. This is Gerard’s second sound design and his last mainstage production. He is very grateful for all the opportunities he has been given and for all the lifelong friendships he has made. His previous sound design was Damn Yankees.

Martina Harte (Stage Manager) is a fourth year BA Theatre Major who has been involved in some stuff and remains that way. She would like to thank Charlie, Gaby, Sarah, Becca, the Senioritas, and the cast, parents, and crew of Wrathful Grapes for making this experience a memorable one.

Gabriela Barrios (Assistant Stage Manager / Props Mistress) is a sophomore studying theater, and has already been involved in a number of shows through the school and Florida Players, mostly in stage management. She appreciates the help and guidance that Charlie, Martina and the rest of the cast and crew gave her while she struggled to get everything done.
Tom Shed (Musician—Banjo, Singer) performs "history, humor and the human condition" throughout the U.S. Tom explores our awareness by looking at our lives, history and the natural world around us. Visit Tom, at www.tomshed.com, watch his music videos at YouTube +Tom Shed or on Facebook.

Olga Godula (Musician—Violin) holds Master's Degrees in Musicology and Ethnomusicology and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology. As a violinist she has collaborated with orchestras, chamber groups, composers, and jazz musicians in Europe and the United States. She teaches violin at the Academy of Music and Art in Gainesville.

SPECIAL THANKS
Jason Weiss, Andy Howard, Ric Rose, Jovon Eberhart, Friends of Theatre and Dance, Sarah White
PRODUCTION TEAM

Fight Director
Assistant Stage Manager
Costume Advisor
Costume Studio Manager
Asst. Costume Studio Manager
Costume Studio Assistants
Sound & Lighting Advisor
Sound Engineer
Master Electrician
Light Shop Assistants
Technical Director
Master Carpenter
Scenic Studio Assistants
Properties
Dance Captains
Director of Operations
Stage Crew

Light Board Operator
Deck Electrician
Sound Operator
Wardrobe Head
Wardrobe Crew

Poster & Program Cover Design
House Management

Jason Weiss
Gabriela Barrios
Stacey Galloway
Lisa Davis
Kate Glennon
Susan Bucciero, Lee Martin, Erica Bascom, & Jaime Samson
Jeremy Sinicki
Gerard Hale III
Todd Bedell
Ryan Bible, B. Lussier, Mike McShane, & Tim Reed
Zak Herring
Tony Berry
Jovon Eberhart, Molly Itlen, Anne Tully & Tim Watson
Gabriela Barrios
Katie Lee & Cree Armstead
Sarah White
Katrina Asmar
Taylor Rector
David Collins
Sarah Boynton
Samantha Montero
Ben Hawkins
Rachel Harrison
Caitlin Hunter
Chelsea Sorenson
Kayla Mason
Angelica-Naia Gabor
Emily Cabrera
Stephen Keenan, Elizabeth Posey,
Marissa Toogood, Antonisha Williams,
Logan Wolfe, Tayliz Rodriguez, Patrick Tran, Sacha Sorrell, Sarah Jackson,
Sandra Garcia
Joseph Urick
Students of THE 4950
University of Florida

College of Fine Arts
Lucinda Lavelli
Edward Schaeffer
Timothy Brophy

Dean
Associate Dean
Assistant Dean

School of Theatre and Dance Faculty
Paul Favini
Kevin Austin
Tim Altmeier
Dr. Rusti Brandman
Yanci Bukovec
Mihai Ciupulescu
Mohamed DaCosta
Lisa Davis
Kelly Drummond Cawthon
Meredith Farmum
Joan Frosch
Stacey Galloway
Tiza Garland
Zak Herring
Pamela Kaye
Kristen O'Neal
Stan Kaye
Tony Mata
Kevin Marshall
Dr. Charlie Mitchell
Dr. Mikell Pinkney
Neta Pulvermacher
Dr. Ralf Remshardt
Isla Garcia-Rose
Ric Rose
Kathy Sarra
Dr. David Shelton
Jill Sonke
Dr. Albert F.C. Weilburg
Dr. Judith Williams
Dr. David Young
Interim Director
Undergraduate Advisor
Performance
Professor Emeritus
Performance
Scenic Design
African Dance
Costume Technology
Dance
Dance
Dance
Costume Design
Movement/Stage Combat
Technical Director
Rendering
Dance
Lighting Design/Design Coordinator
Musical Theatre
Center for Arts and Public Policy
Performance
Theory/Performance Coordinator
Dance
History/Dramaturgy
Dance
Dance Coordinator
Performance
Professor Emeritus
Dance
Professor Emeritus
Performance
Graduate Research Professor

Staff
Todd Bedell
Tony Berry
Mary Byrd
Kate Glennon
Sarah White
Master Electrician
Master Carpenter
Secretary
Costume Studio Assistant Manager
Director of Operations
The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival-
XLIII

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This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for inclusion at the KCACTF regional festival and can also be considered for invitation to the KCACTF national festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC in the spring of 2011.

Last year more than 1,300 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.
THEATER REVIEW

“The Grapes of Wrath” features Angie Petty as Rose, left, and Alaina Manchester as Ma Joad at the University of Florida's Constans Theatre through Sunday.

‘Grapes of Wrath’ a moving, theatrical experience

By Dick Maxwell
Sun theater critic

The University of Florida production of “The Grapes of Wrath,” an adaptation of John Steinbeck’s novel that opened Friday at the Constans Theatre, is a big play with a cast of 38, many of whom speak in the dialect of the American Southwest. The actors’ voices are not amplified, which at times muffles their speeches but is consistent with the soft-spoken people they portray. Director Charles Mitchell's concept emphasizes the humanity that exists between the members of the Joad family toward themselves and others as they face the travails of their journey from Oklahoma to California. The characters in “The

‘The Grapes of Wrath’

What: UF School of Theatre and Dance production of classic John Steinbeck story

When: 7:30 p.m. today through Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday

Where: Constans Theatre at the UF Nadine McGuire Pavilion, UF campus

Tickets: $17, $13 for UF students and staff

Info: 392-1653 or www.union.ufl.edu/ubc/

Grapes of Wrath” are subjected to terrible hardships, and while the story speaks to the strength of these people to endure, this production does not create enough of a sense of the effect these hardships must have on their spirits.

Beginning in 1936, Steinbeck wrote a series of articles about migrant workers in California for the San Francisco News, and he traveled the state with Tom Collins, a man who was in charge of building camps for the workers as part of the New Deal. The material Steinbeck obtained from his research was used in both the news articles and the subsequent novel, which was published in 1939.

While Steinbeck’s novel recounted the conditions of desperate agricultural workers who had descended in droves on the state, it did not tell the complete story. Conditions were far worse than

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those described in the book.

As Steinbeck's protagonists, the Joads were a family of "Okies" who typified the groups of people lured west from the dust bowl by promises of plentiful work harvesting fruit and vegetables for good wages. In the book, as in the play, which was adapted by Frank Galanti, things go from bad to worse when the Joads get to the Golden State as they learn that finding work is difficult, the landowners don't pay a living wage and deputies hired to keep order beat them and burn their camps.

A skilled production team enhances the theatrical experience: Costumes designed by Rebecca Wallace are appropriate in their simplicity. They are the type of clothes and in the condition one would expect for hard-working people of the soil. Lighting designed by Timothy Reed and sound designed by Gerard Hale III add sunsets, lightning and thunderstorms, gunshots and the desolation of the wind to the play.

The set is not minimal but avoids clutter. A barrier made of wooden slats that suggests the weatherworn buildings left behind transects the stage. A truck has been created to hold the family as they travel, and it provides a unique setting as they ride in the front seat with the lights shining toward the audience, creating a sense of close comfort for the occupants despite the loneliness of the country through which they are traveling.

The utility of the Constans stage comes into play through the use of trap doors that are lifted in various spots to emit lighting simulating campfires. An interesting effect is created by utilizing the orchestra pit to contain a body of water used by the cast for washing and in a dramatic storm sequence that also features rainfall.

The director has chosen to have live music provided onstage by Tom Shed (banjo) and Olgia Godula (violin), and there is also a lively square dance sequence. Mitchell has enhanced the story by having several members of the cast narrate short passages from the novel that were not included in the script. These additions provide color without disturbing the course of action in the play.

Particular mention should be made of performances by members of the Joad family: Tom, played by Adam Kroeger, is excellent as a male stalwart of the family; Ma, played by Alaina Manchester, is their pillar of strength; Grandpa is played by Kevin Marshall, whose performance is over the top but provides comic relief to what is basically a very serious play; Rose-of-Sharon is played by Angie Petty, whose portrayal of the tragic pregnant young woman is moving; Grandma Joad is played by Candice Clift as a long-suffering elderly woman who tries mightily to keep Grandpa under control and to get the family to pray.

A notable performance is also obtained from Jason Weiss as Jim Casy, who is relied upon to provide spiritual comfort to the family despite his status as a lapsed preacher.

The University of Florida's production of "The Grapes of Wrath" retains the spirit of the novel and succeeds in being an entertaining, if not overly moving, theatrical experience.
APPENDIX D

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jason Weiss is a Master of Fine Arts Candidate at the University of Florida, with a concentration in Acting. Jason received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Miami in 1997. Jason was born in Princeton, New Jersey, and grew up in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. Upon graduation from UM, he moved to New York City to pursue a professional acting career. Highlights from his professional career include working with Harold Pinter on The Homecoming in the role of Lenny, as well as working with John Patrick Shanley on The Big Funk in the role of Austin. He played The Voice in Francis Ford Coppola’s The Conversation at 29th Street Rep, Haemon in The Burial at Thebes at La MaMa etc., and the title role in the original musical Tim, by Neil Berg and Nick Meglin. Jason also played Harry Houdini’s stunt double in the original Broadway cast of Ragtime: The Musical. Some of Jason’s favorite regional theatre roles have been Iago in Othello (Virginia Shakespeare Festival); Edmund in King Lear; Tybalt in Romeo & Juliet; Touchstone in As You Like it; Autolycus in The Winter’s Tale (Princeton Rep); and Richard Hannay in The 39 Steps, Jonathan Harker in Dracula, and Bernard in Boeing Boeing (Hippodrome Theatre). Other University of Florida credits include Cloud Nine, How I Learned to Drive, Pride and Prejudice, The Clean House and Oedipus the King. Jason spent 3 years on ABC’s One Life to Live playing EMT Evan Nander, with additional roles on ABC’s All My Children, Oxygen’s Trackers, MTV’s Crib Crashers, and the Discovery Channel film, Shipwreck: USS Squalas. He has done over a dozen national and regional commercials and is a proud member of AEA, SAG and AFTRA.