OF MICE AND MEN
at the Ventura Court Theatre

Reviewed by Madeline Shaver

John Steinbeck’s beautifully crafted play rises again in a brilliant production by the Antares Company, the professional ensemble of classical actors founded in 1990 under the auspices of the Mark Taper Forum. A splendid case breaks new life into the story of immigrant laborers George and Lenny uncharacteristically bonded in a society of insensate losers.

The inherent melancholy of the play rears its head in the hands of these experienced actors, who are clearly there for “the work,” not to showcase their individual careers. Each performance is a gem, though none overpowers the vibrant honesty and simplicity of the whole. The giant Lenny has enormous strength but the mind of a slow child and a dangerouseway for literally loving small animals to death. As Lenny’s self-appointed protector, George is burdened with the responsibility of keeping him out of trouble, but is bound by a kind of love and his own need for human companionship.

Jack Milligan gives the role of George a deeply sensitive rendering, drawing out the very essence of Steinbeck’s mythopoeic language. Eric Allen Kramer, driven into the soul of the simple giant Lenny with direct honesty, avoiding gimmicks and quips. The vulnerability of men who have given up hope is beautifully expressed in every scene—in the back of Candy’s (Ralph Drachefl) neck as he turns away from the others when his old dog is shot; in the out-of-place laughter of a slightly-bowed Whit (J.B. Callais); in the painful anger of Crooks (Hawthorne James), who/as the black continued on page 55