

LA COSECHA / THE HARVEST

NEW SHOW! The story of an immigrant farm worker.
In Spanish and English. Grades 5 – 12, Colleges and adult audiences



Cesar is a young man looking for work. But when he can't pay the Coyote who has smuggled him across the border, he becomes caught in a web of modern-day slavery. This drama, presented in Spanish and English, features dozens of mask and puppet characters along with live music by Dean Jones on trombone, keyboard and percussion and Juan Basilio Sanchez on guitar and vocals.

The story is brought to life by two archetypal characters: *The Longing for Justice* and *The Longing for Something Better*. Together they explore a hidden wound in the American Dream. The show is 55 minutes; presented by a company of five performers.

Production of **La Cosecha / The Harvest** has been made possible by support from the Jim Henson Foundation, The Puffin Foundation, and by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, and from the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art

Photos: R Gumpel



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

This mask & puppet production is presented in front of and above a black curtain measuring 18' W X 8'H. Two musicians with an array of instruments (keyboard, percussion, trombone, guitar, etc.) are positioned downstage left of the set. The show is designed for a proscenium presentation. It will not work on a thrust stage if audience is seated on the sides.

Company Size: 3 performers, 2 musicians

Running Time: 50 minutes.

Space Requirements: 36'W X 20'D X 12'H

Tech Support: 1 sound technician, 1 lighting technician

Load-in: We will arrive two hours prior to house opening. Two stagehands are needed to assist in the load-in. A parking place is required for our bus (25' L X 8'W X 10' H, NY plate # A98 8LN).

Set: A back curtain 24'W X 7.5'H is supported by two stepladders. An 8'X2' "table" is centered in front of the curtain. Two smaller boxes are right and left of the center table. The play's action takes place at all three locations as well as in the space above the back curtain. The set will be positioned approximately 12' from the lip of the stage. The House front curtain is not necessary.

Lighting: A balanced (warm/cool) wash on the set & musicians. Lighting specials for each of the "levels"- center table, two side boxes and above the upstage curtain.

Sound: Arm-of-the-Sea comes equipped with all instruments, microphones and effects. A direct box (DI) for patching into the House sound system is needed downstage left. The musicians will mix their sound on a small board on stage, then send that pre-mix to the House board. Sound board operator will control overall EQ and volume. A monitor is required downstage left for the musicians.

For small venues, if necessary, we can use our own sound system. Please clarify this arrangement with us beforehand. For venues larger than 250 seats, we prefer to patch into the House system.

Presenter Must Also Provide: Two dressing rooms with toilet facilities & plenty of cold drinking water. When load-ins or shows span a mealtime, the presenter will provide a light meal: e.g. sandwiches, fruit, tea, coffee, juice, etc.



Arm-of-the-Sea Theater: La Cosecha / The Harvest

A Study Guide for Educators and Students

Arm-of-the-Sea Theater combines the visual imagery of masks, puppets and paintings together with live music to portray its stories. This ancient art form is still a vibrant means of contemporary theatre. Arm-of-the-Sea has been creating original shows since 1982. This is the company's 28th production.

La Cosecha / The Harvest is about a young Mexican immigrant's experience as a farmworker in the United States. As the title suggests, parts of the show are in both Spanish and English. As the title also suggests, food production is a central theme; specifically, the invisible workers at the bottom rung of our prolific food system. The show runs about 50 minutes and is presented by a company of three performers and two musicians.

Plot Synopsis

Three human aspirations ---(1) *The Longing for Justice*, (2) *The Longing for Something Better* and (3) *The Need to Wake Up and See* are represented as mask characters. They introduce the drama and serve as symbolic benchmarks for the audience to judge the play's action.

A lady shops for fruits and vegetables in a supermarket while an info – mercial for the Gold Palace Brand blares its message: "*We're the name behind the brand name, and we control the whole food chain.*" When the ad finishes, small farmworker figures appear from behind the boxes of food and Cesar, the main character, introduces his story.

Cesar comes from a small community in southern Mexico. For generations it has been a place of self-sufficient farmers. Now, however, Mexico has entered into free trade agreements and allows corn and other food imports into the country with no tariffs, (a form of import tax). This has resulted in local markets being flooded with cheaper imported food so small farmers like Cesar's family can't make enough money to continue farming. Cesar says goodbye to his Grandma and leaves home to look for work in El Norte, the United States.

He climbs on a bus—"La Esperanza / My Hope"---and is guided in his journey by a giant eagle. (Side note: On the flag of Mexico is an eagle clutching a snake. The combined bird / snake image reoccurs throughout many of Mexico's ancient cultures. It will also symbolize the central conflict in this drama.)

Central Conflict

At the Border, Cesar lacks the right permits to enter the US and is turned away. He tries swimming across the river (the term *wetback* is derived from this way of crossing over). However, he is caught and returned to his homeland. Then he meets the *Coyote*, or smuggler. The Coyote agrees to take him across, but it will cost a great deal of money and they will have to go the long and dangerous way—through the desert. Cesar agrees and they make the journey, barely avoiding border patrol helicopters, rattlesnake bites and death by dehydration. Then the Coyote discovers that Cesar doesn't have enough money to pay him. So he tells Cesar: "*Unfortunately, my friend, I'll have to make some other arrangements.*"

To recoup his costs, the Coyote makes a deal and sells Cesar to a labor contractor who runs a crew of farmworkers. The workers are in *debt peonage* to the contractor, which means they are not free to leave the camp until they have paid off their debts. The workers are harvesting tomatoes. They are paid 42 cents per bucket, which comes out to about 50 dollars for picking two tons of tomatoes. From their earnings the contractor subtracts rent, food and transportation costs. Under these conditions, it is very difficult for the workers to survive and pay off their debt. This is a form of modern-day slavery.

Cesar endures this situation of abuse and exploitation. Finally, his liberation follows an epic struggle between the Eagle and the Rattlesnake. Cesar rises from the fight larger-than-life to confront the contractor and the system of injustice that enslaves them both.

Themes for discussion:

1.) The US is a nation of immigrants. The newest arrivals often do the work that no one else will do. However, new immigrants often face hostility and discrimination. Research your family history to find out which of your family members immigrated and what conditions they met upon their arrival.

2.) Agricultural workers were excluded from the protections and rights granted workers in most other occupations under the National Labor Relations Act of 1936. These important rights include unemployment and disability insurance, minimum wage, overtime pay, and the right to form unions. The work of growing and harvesting food is one of the most essential jobs. However, migrant farmworkers are some of the lowest paid and most unprotected workers in the nation. Find out about the life of Cesar Chavez who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his lifelong struggle for the dignity and human rights of farmworkers. If there are farms near where you live, do they employ seasonal workers? Where are these workers from?

3.) The 13th Amendment to the Constitution, passed just after the Civil War, outlaws slavery, peonage and indentured servitude. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 prohibits "the recruitment, harboring or transportation of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion." Despite these federal laws, slavery exists in the US today.

In 2005 in western New York, five members of the Garcia family received court sentences for operating a slavery ring of migrant farmworkers. There have also been at least four major cases of slavery involving over a thousand agricultural workers brought to justice in Florida. Just like the abolitionists that fought against slavery in the 1800s, there are abolitionist organizations today. For example, check out the Coalition of Immokalee Workers at <http://www.ciw-online.org>

An item of good news pertaining to themes in this play:

Some of the largest buyers of tomatoes are companies that own fast food restaurant chains. Because of the enormous quantities of produce that they buy, these companies have the power to set the price they pay to the growers. As a result, wages paid to workers that harvest tomatoes in Florida had remained about the same for the past 25 years. Farm worker advocates conducted a campaign to increase wages for these workers. This campaign included a four-year boycott of Taco Bell, one of the largest buyers of tomatoes. In 2005 Yum Brands, the company that owns Taco Bell (in addition to Pizza Hut, CFC, A & W, and Long John Silvers) agreed to pay 1 penny per pound more to the workers that harvest the tomatoes they buy. This small increase effectively doubled the workers' daily wages. In addition, the company also agreed to guarantee that human rights would be respected throughout their tomato supply chain.

For background reading on the themes of this show, the following books are highly recommended:

Daniel Rothenberg's **With These Hands, The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today**

Charles Thompson, Jr & Melinda Wiggins, editors: **The Human Cost of Food**

John Annerino's **Dead in their Tracks: Crossing America's Desert Borderlands**

La Cosecha / The Harvest was created by Marlena Marallo and Patrick Wadden. The show is performed by Carl Welden, Dale Gibbons and Patrick Wadden. The music is by Dean Jones on trombone, keyboard and percussion and Juan Basilio Sanchez on guitar and vocals.

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For more information about Arm-of-the-Sea Theater check out: www.armofthesea.org.

Please write and let us know what you liked and didn't like about the show.

Arm-of-the-Sea Theater

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The Coyote smuggles Cesar across the border.

All photos by Roy Gumpel