***The Grapes of Wrath* Audio Introduction**

Thank you for booking tickets to an audio-described performance of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Carrie Cracknell directs Frank Galati’s award-winning adaptation of John Steinbeck’s masterpiece. Tony Award-winner Cherry Jones is joined by Harry Treadaway in this moving and deeply atmospheric story of a struggle against a hostile climate to find a place to call home.

The running time is approximately 2 hours and 50 minutes, including a 20 minute interval.

Touch Tours will precede the audio-described performances, an hour and a half before the start time. Patrons attending a touch tour should meet staff in the Lyttelton Theatre foyer seating area.

This introduction will be repeated live fifteen minutes before the performance begins. This allows us to give you extra information about the production, if needed. This will also enable you to familiarize yourself with the headsets.

Please note that this production includes strong language and depictions of migration, homelessness, starvation, violence and death including still birth. It contains flashing lights, loud sounds/thunder and gun shots.

**Some background**

An article in the printed programme, by Susan Shillinglaw explains that John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* was a work borne out of a life of journalistic assignment. It begins:

“In the late 1930s, John Steinbeck wrote three novels about California field workers, books that cemented his reputation as a disturber. His labour trilogy scraped nerves and assumptions: In Dubious Battle (1936) focuses on labour organisers who orchestrate a doomed strike in a peach orchard; Of Mice and Men (1937) is about ‘earth longings,’ as Steinbeck put it. John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath was a work borne out of urgency that hasn’t dimmed in today’s world of displaced migrants. Although The Grapes of Wrath is a novel concerned with social issues, one must also remember the catalysts for farmworker migration to California. In the 1930s, with the Great Depression firmly established, a series of political and natural factors converged to create an ecological disaster. Since WWI, the US government had encouraged wheat farming in the great plains states of the Midwest and the formation of large agricultural companies. Over a hundred million acres of native grasslands were plowed over and wheat planted; that left topsoil vulnerable to desiccation in a region that received, on average, 20 inches of rain per year. This monoculture, followed by 1930s drought and winds, resulted in huge dust storms that clouded vast sections of the country. The land was left impoverished. Agriculture collapsed, and small farmers saw their farms seized by the bank for failure to pay their rent or mortgage. This Dust Bowl, considered to be the be the worst manmade ecological disaster in US history, set the stage for The Grapes of Wrath.”

**Set, characters and costumes**

In this adaptation of John Steinbeck’s novel, The Grapes of Wrath, the dispossessed Joad family trek from Oklahoma to California through depression-era America, in search of work, and a way to survive.

The country the Joads encounter is peopled by a desolate array of hungry and impoverished characters, portrayed by a multiracial cast of 27, many playing multiple roles. Their clothes, dusty and worn, are practical and in muted tones. Men wear jackets, shirts with undershirts, practical trousers, and sturdy work-boots. Women wear calf-length dresses, often with grubby aprons.

The first character we meet is **Jim Casy**. Once a preacher, now Jim’s looking for work the same as everyone else. He’s a muscular black man, past forty, but with his afro-textured hair and thick beard still jet black. His broad face is expressive, even when he’s ruminating, his mouth pressed shut. To start, Jim wears a grey jacket and dark grey waistcoat over a blue shirt, tucked into dusty black jeans, with grey boots beneath them. As time goes on, he loses the waistcoat and jacket, and the buttons of his shirt are undone, revealing a white undershirt beneath.

He meets **Tom Joad**, a young man in his mid-twenties, returning home after a stint in the state penitentiary. Like the rest of the Joad family, Tom is white. Clean-shaven, he’s got a long face with high cheekbones, and dark, intelligent eyes. With short brown hair, he’s athletic, although he isn’t arrogant or imposing with it. Instead, his demeanour is generally warm, pragmatic, and measured. However, as the family’s situation worsens, he displays flashes of a fierce, fist-clenching temper. He begins in a blue flat cap and dark jacket, but later takes these off to reveal a blue striped shirt, worn over dark blue jeans rolled up over heavy work-boots.

At the house, we meet his father, **Pa Joad**, a crumpled man in his sixties. Pa’s rather thin, with a drooping face, his brown hair balding at the crown. He wears a blue waistcoat over a white shirt, and pinkish trousers over brown boots.

The matriarch of the family is **Ma Joad**, in her sixties with sharp eyes, very clear and blue. They’re set into a round, open face, with her straight steel-grey hair scraped back from it into a neat bun. She wears a creased wrap-dress in dark green check, a white collar peeking out beneath it. A grease-stained brown apron is tied around her waist, and she’s wearing work-boots just like the men, with thick socks.

The eldest son of the family is **Noah**. A taciturn man in his thirties, he’s thickset, with a large, round head and heavy-ridged brows. It’s hard to tell exactly if Noah’s expression is surly or vacant – he keeps his mouth set shut, and trudges with weighty steps. His barrel chest is covered by a white shirt, and his beige trousers are held up by suspenders.

**Rose of Sharon** (Rosashawn) is the eldest daughter, pregnant, and full of sensuality and life. About 20 years old, she has enormous grey eyes that shine out from her delicate features. Auburn hair tumbles down her back, a few strands of it tied up just to keep it off her face. To begin, despite moving with the slight backwards lean of a pregnant woman accommodating her growing stomach, there’s a voluptuousness to her movements. This is particularly pronounced when she perches on her husband Connie’s lap, kissing him passionately. Her calf-length, v-neck dress – white, with pink flowers - drapes between her legs, showing her thighs. Of all the characters, her shoes are the least practical: flat brown leather, barely more substantial than sandals. Later, as her belly grows and her movements become more restrained, she’s in a far more austere outfit – a shapeless dark blue linen shift dress, although still in the same shoes as before.

Her husband **Connie** is tall, muscular, vigorous, with dark brown skin and glossy black curls. He wears a red-check shirt, often open over his under-shirt, and beige trousers.

**Al** is another Joad son, sixteen years old and obsessed with finding a girl, he has the slender physique of someone just passed puberty. With short brown hair and large blue eyes, he first comes in wearing just blue jeans and white vest, buttoning on an off-white check shirt.

**Uncle John** is Pa’s single brother, a quiet man who lingers at the edges of family, at least to begin with. In his fifties, he’s a pale, somewhat gaunt man, clean-shaven with prominent cheekbones and heavy brow-ridges. He wears loose-fitting denim – jeans and box jacket.

Grandma & Grandpa Joad live with the family. Both elderly – in their 80s, with grey hair - **Grandma Joad** wears a blue calf-length dress with an apron. **Grandpa**, tall and gangly, is getting dressed when we meet him, in long brown trousers held up with suspenders. He has a crumpled brown pork-pie hat.

There are two younger children, a girl and a boy, who almost never speak, but play together and scamper around as the rest of the family talk. The **young boy** wears blue denim overalls, and **the girl**, a blue floral dress.

As they leave their Oklahoma home in search of work in California, many characters come into the lives of the Joad family. In the first tent-city they come to, they’re greeted by **Floyd Knowles**, sitting behind a low, hand-pulled wooden trolley. He’s a tall black man in his thirties, in a grubby off-white t-shirt and blue jeans. His wife, **Mrs Knowles**, a black woman in her twenties with shoulder length corkscrew curls worn half-up, busies herself around the camp with a baby in a sling strapped to her torso.

The same actress plays **Agnes Wainwright**, a young girl Al becomes involved with later in the story. Then, she wears ribbons in her hair and a pink gingham smock dress.

Many other characters pass through their lives for a single scene, never to be seen again. These will be described as they appear. They include sheriffs in Stetsons, police officers with pistols holstered to their hips, and numerous ordinary Americans, crumpled and dirty and travelling on, just as the Joads are.

A folk band appear on stage during scene transitions, a musical accompaniment to the passage of time. The lead singer, a brown-skinned woman in her twenties, steps forward, strumming on a banjo or an acoustic guitar. She wears her hair in two neat black plaits. Sometimes she’s joined by a single musician, playing a dobro – a kind of acoustic guitar with a round metal plate in its centre – sometimes a full band, on guitars, accordions, and fiddles. All wear the same style of clothes as the characters in the story – jeans, waistcoats, plaid shirts. However, they’re cleaner, neater, and not coated in the same layers of dust and sweat as the people whose lives they sing about.

The story is played out against a backdrop of a cinema-sized screen which displays images evoking the big skies, landscapes and atmospheres through which the Joad’s travel, from Oklahoma to California. The screen is washed with subtle, pale colours – soft pinks, oranges, blues and mauves, when reflecting a sunrise or sunset, before plunging into darkness as night falls. A dust storm, or desert landscape is depicted by a wash of dull-white, or beige.

In front of the screen, the large Lyttleton stage, some 12 metres wide, by 10 deep, is covered in large, earthy-grey panels. The stage is largely open and bare, except for structures that emerge from the darkness beyond, that help set the particular location. The structures are arranged on a truck – a shallow platform that is able to move forward and back.

Initially, the bare stage has just a few wooden poles sticking up from it, perhaps suggesting surviving tree stumps, as the performers evoke the conditions of a dust storm simply by the use of their bodies – leaning into the force of the storm at unnatural angles. The remnants of the Joad’s home glide forward from the darkness behind – just the remains of a wooden shack with a few items strewn around.

We next find the Joad’s holing up in Uncle John’s house, when the exterior of his weathered, wooden shack glides forward on the truck – it has a screen door just to right of centre and a window to the left. In front of the shack, set to the right, is a jalopy – a dilapidated, rusting heap of a vehicle. It has a “Hudson Super Six” cab and its rear has been converted into open storage space, with 2 bench seats along its side, with an extra seat provided by its tail gate. A metal frame, like a tent skeleton, has been built over the storage space, with a roll of tarpaulin on top, which can be unrolled to provide shelter, when needed. Running boards on either side provide more space for standing passengers. When packed and loaded with the Joad’s belongings, the jalopy is crammed full of cases, barrels, buckets and oil lanterns, as well as its 12 bodies.

As their journey commences, the jalopy simply rotates in the space, manoeuvred by a couple of its male passengers, who push it with the full force of their bodies, whilst others sit in the back, or in the driver and passenger seats, their bodies jigging, creating the effect of the vehicle being in motion.

At one point a long table is set on the left of the space, still in Uncle John’s yard, where the family sits to eat.

The various locations that the Joad’s arrive at on their journey will be described as they appear. They include a barren stretch of land where they stop to camp, lighting a small fire. When they stop at a small encampment, a small group of men sit hunched around a lamplight, like a street light, lorded over by an opportunistic “Proprietor”, wearing a smart Stetson hat. The Colorado River is represented by a wide and narrow trough of water that opens up across the front edge of the space.

Having arrived in California, the Joads find themselves in an encampment, setting up a tent, just one among many others that are crammed into the space, with camp fires and various belongings dotted in between.

Having been forced to vacate this encampment, the Joads find themselves at a slightly more established and organised camp, with 3 structures lined across the back that are more like small houses, albeit still covered in tarpaulin. The space in front is decorated with lights stretched across wooden poles in preparation for a festive line dance.

These and the few remaining locations occupied by the Joads – another dilapidated wooden shack and a barn - will be described as they appear.

**Cast and Creatives**

Jim Casey – Natey Jones

The Joads:

Tom – Harry Treadaway

Pa – Greg Hicks

Ma – Cherry Jones

Noah – Tom Bulpett

Rose of Sharon – Miran Mack

Her husband Connie – Anish Roy

Al – Tucker St Ivany

Uncle John – Michael Schaeffer

Grandma – Lin Blakley

Grandpa – Christopher Godwin

Floyd Knowles – Afolabi Alli

Agnes Wainwright – Robyn Sinclair, who also plays Mrs Knowles

The musicians:

Rachel Barnes; Morgan Burgess; Maimuna Memon; Matthew Romain.

Music Director – Osnat Schmool

Fight Director – Kate Waters

Sound Designer – Donato Wharton

Movement Director – Ira Mandela Siobhan

Lighting Designer – Guy Hoare

Composer – Stuart Earl

Original songs by – Maimuna Memon

Costume Designer – Evie Gurney

Set Designer – Alex Eales

Director – Carrie Cracknell

**Section 4: The Access mailing list and upcoming performances**

Our National Theatre at Home streaming platform has a wide range of audio-described productions available including *Till the Stars Come Down, The House of Bernarda Alba*, and *Death of England*. You can subscribe to the service for a monthly fee or rent productions one at a time. To find out more, and stream the productions with audio description, visit <https://www.ntathome.com/audio-described-and-british-sign-language.>

To book tickets for shows at the NT at the adjusted Access rate, please subscribe to our Access List. For more information and to sign up, visit <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/your-visit/access/access-list>, call 020 7452 3961, or email [boxoffice@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:boxoffice@nationaltheatre.org.uk).

We hold an allocation of tickets for members of our [access list](https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/your-visit/access/access-list) for every show. If any performances listed on our website are shown as “Sold Out”, tickets may still be available: please log in to your NT account to access tickets, or call the Box Office access line on 020 7452 3961.