

Amber Waves

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY

JAMES STILL

Scenic Designer

RUSSELL
METHENY

Costume Designer

JOYCE KIM
LEE

Lighting Designer

MICHELLE
HABECK

Video by

MARK
WILLIAMS

Original Songs & Music by

TIM & JASON
GRIMM & WILBER

Sound Designer

ANDREW
HOPSON

Dramaturg

JANET
ALLEN

Assistant Director

MICHAEL
CALLAHAN

Stage Manager

JOEL
MARKUS*

Amber Waves is produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

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MAINSTAGE • FEBRUARY 9 - MARCH 4, 2000

THE CAST

<i>Deb</i>	COURTNEY BOLIN
<i>Penny</i>	JAN LUCAS*
<i>Mike</i>	TIM GRIMM*
<i>Scott</i>	MAT HOSTETLER*
<i>Julie</i>	KRISTEN COOLER
<i>Johnny</i>	JOHN HENRY REDWOOD*

The voice of the umpire is John Henry Redwood.
Understudy for the roles of Deb and Julie is Hannah Lutgring.

*Actors and stage managers employed in this production
who are members of Actors' Equity Association,
the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

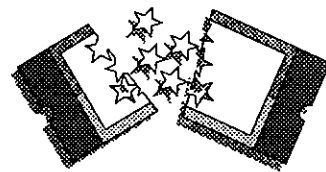
THE SETTING

The Olson farm and other places in and around their Indiana town.

ACT ONE • SUMMER & FALL

Intermission

ACT TWO • WINTER & SPRING



IRT
INDIANA
REPERTORY
THEATRE

Artistic Director
JANET ALLEN

Managing Director
BRIAN PAYNE

presents

Amber Waves

About the Play

A *Amber Waves* celebrates the courage of an Indiana family struggling to keep their farm and to maintain their way of life. When drought threatens to ruin their crops and prices plummet, the Olsons are in danger of losing their farm. The impact of these circumstances on Mike and Penny Olson and their two teenage children shapes the plot of the play.

Understanding farming as a way of life is a key to understanding this production of *Amber Waves*. The Olsons are farmers. As farmers, the family feels a strong bond with the land on which they make their living. Mike Olson states, "You sell some land, it's like losing an arm or a leg. It's not just land ... It's a member of the family." The Olsons' land is a strong part of their heritage. This land and the farming of it is as much a part of their identity as religion or ethnicity might be to another family; it shapes their perception of the world.

Several artistic devices significantly enhance the sense of history in this production. The character asides, or "direct-address arias" as playwright James Still refers to them, are speeches addressed directly to the audience rather than to another character on stage. Asides help us as the audience to understand what the characters on stage think and feel. The direct address invites the audience into the world of the play, offering intimacy and a sense

of trust. They introduce us to memories of the past and lend insight into what motivates the actions and internal conflicts of the characters.

The use of video images throughout this production assists us in experiencing the passage of time and in gaining a sense of the vast space of the rural countryside. The video sequences, filmed by Indianapolis filmmaker Mark Williams, depict the landscape of the play. The images illustrate the change of seasons on an actual Indiana farm over the course of a year, reminding us of how important the earth and the weather are to a farmer.

The music which accompanies the video sequences enhances the emotional tone of the production. Through the songs, we experience the feelings of a farmer and his family as they face the challenges that arise with each new season on the farm.

Amber Waves heralds the heroism and courage of everyday farm life. The production also celebrates Indiana. *Amber Waves* was written by IRT playwright-in-residence James Still and features original music composed and performed by Indiana actor-musician Tim Grimm, who also plays the role of Mike Olson. In addition to Grimm, *Amber Waves* boasts three other Indiana actors, Jan Lucas, Courtney Bolin, and Kristen Cooler. Who says nothing exciting ever happens in Indiana? ★ —SL

Meet the Playwright

HE'S NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE!

James Still, the IRT's playwright-in-residence, has come a long way from his hometown of Pomona, Kansas. In fact he now lives in chic Venice Beach, California. So what is he doing in Indianapolis? In a way, he's coming home; at least that's how he describes it. "A long time ago I ran away from home," James explains, "It took me a long time to find my way back. In many ways, *Amber Waves* has been my road home." Still has been very busy away from home; writing, directing, and acting all over the country. He has written for Nickelodeon's "Little Bear" and Bill Cosby's "Little Bill." His screenplay for *The Velocity of Gary* was made into a movie starring Selma Hayek and Vincent D'Onofrio which was released last year. Eleven of James's plays have been published and performed all over the United States and in London. In addition to all of this he spends 5 to 7 days a month in Indianapolis working with the IRT through a National Theatre Artist Residency grant from the Theatre Communications Group and the Pew Charitable Trusts. When he arrived in Indianapolis to spend a month as director of *Amber Waves*, he stated, "I can honestly say I've never looked more forward to a rehearsal process in my career." Welcome home, James. ★ —SL

In 1983, a farmer bankrupt on 3400 acres in Ohio told me that he was making a personal study of other farmers in his dilemma. He found that the crucial straw that broke the farmer's back was not high interest rates, not low prices, not poor management, not high costs, not an overextension of credit—although all or some of these factors contributed to the downfall—but a streak of disastrously bad weather. If that uncontrollable risk is not bad enough, the farmer's destiny rides also on the whim and caprice of national and international politics.

A farmer can only move at nature's pace. Although he is trying mightily, he can't make corn grow as fast as manipulated interest rates can make money grow. Corn grows the same whether interest rates are 8 or 15 percent.... Not since the philosopher John Ruskin, who died in 1900, has society seriously concerned itself with the possible consequences of this discrepancy and asked basic questions: What rate of interest is compatible with biological growth? What rate of interest is compatible with a permanent, regenerative agriculture?

—Gene Logsdon
from *At Nature's Pace:
Farming and the American Dream*

Meet the Actors

GET REAL

Jan Lucas and Tim Grimm play the roles of Penny and Mike Olson in *Amber Waves*. They play the roles of husband and wife in real life, as well, and are both successful actors who left LA. If they look familiar, it may be because both have had recurrent roles on successful TV series, Jan in "The Human Factor" and Tim in "Reasonable Doubts" and "T.U.R.K.S." Tim has also acted in several blockbuster movies such as *Clear and Present Danger* and *Backdraft*. Three years ago Jan and Tim decided to move their family (they have three boys) to a Columbus, Indiana, farm. In fact, Tim and Jan's farm provided a great deal of inspiration for the music of *Amber Waves*, which is written and performed by Tim along with Jason Wilber; Jan sings on some of the tracks. So why did they leave LA? "Kids" is Jan's answer; "values" is Tim's. Tim and Jan both felt that Indiana's values and priorities were more in line with their own. "Everyone in LA is there either to make money or become a star" Jan explains. They felt that Indiana could offer them what Tim characterizes as "whole lives." Whatever the reason, Indiana now has a little piece of Hollywood. Really. ★ —SL

FARM TIES

African American actor John Henry Redwood plays One-Eyed Johnny Diamond in *Amber Waves*. Johnny is a widowed farmer who lives across the road from the Olsons. Deb, the Olson's daughter, earns money by helping out on Johnny's farm. They develop a friendship which becomes a gift for both of them: for Deb, Johnny is someone she can confide in about her worries about her parents; for Johnny, Deb helps to dispel his loneliness, now that his wife is gone and his children have moved away. They become surrogate granddaughter and grandfather for each other.

The 1997 USDA study of farming in Indiana reveals that there are fifty farms in the state that are owned and operated by blacks. This number represents a decrease from 1992, when 67 African American-owned farms were reported. Not surprisingly, 47 of the 50 1997 farms are operated by men. The average age of these black farmers is 57. Sixteen of these farms are grain operations, ten are focused on beef cattle production, with another nine of the farms cultivating tobacco.

John Henry is an accomplished actor as well as playwright. He has acted in two plays previously at the IRT, and his own plays have been produced across the country. As you watch the play, consider why playwright James Still named Johnny "One-Eyed." What do you think he meant? ★ —JA

SERENDIPITY

Mat Hostetler comes to his first show at the IRT highly recommended. A native of Kansas, Mat attended the University of Kansas, alma mater of playwright-director James Still. When preparing to cast *Amber Waves*, James called two of his former University of Kansas teachers to inquire if they knew of any young actors capable of performing the role of Scott. Independent of one another, both recommended Mat, who currently lives in LA. James Still lives in nearby Venice Beach, so he called Mat and asked him to audition; Mat was then cast in the role. Mat has appeared in numerous regional theatre productions in LA, Colorado, and Kansas. His film and TV credits include *Truman*, *Monday after the Miracle* and "Once and Again." Mat adds that he is thrilled to be back in the Midwest. ★ —SL

ACTING UP

This production of *Amber Waves* boasts two young actors who have come up through the ranks of the IRT to perform sizeable roles in an IRT Mainstage production. Courtney Bolin and Kristen Cooler play Deb Olson and her best friend, Julie, respectively. Being in a show at the IRT involves a great deal of work. In addition to completing all their normal Carmel Junior High and Zionsville Lower Middle School class work, Courtney and Kristen rehearse an average of 20 to 30 hours and/or perform eight shows per week.

Juggling school and acting can be difficult. When asked how the actresses get all their homework done, Courtney credits her mom and dad for tutoring her and some teachers for being understanding. Kristen says that during breaks in rehearsal she pulls out assignments to work on. In addition to long hours and hard work there are other pressures in doing a show; mistakes can be made. When asked about her most embarrassing moment on stage, Courtney replies, "I fell off the stage in *Annie* when I was five."

It's not easy to get into a show at the IRT. These ladies have experience. Courtney began acting at the age of five and performed in a number of shows with the St. Luke's Players and the Day Nursery Auxiliary before landing her first role with the IRT: Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1997. Courtney then went on to play Belinda Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol* in 1998. *Amber Waves* is her third show with the IRT. Kristen was accepted into the IRT's Acting Conservatory for Youth last summer, where she studied acting, voice, and movement. She then landed the role of Liesl in the St. Luke's Players production of *The Sound of Music*. Kristen also sang solos with the Adult Chancel Choir and several school performances. *Amber Waves* is Kristen's first professional show at the IRT.

Despite all the hard work and long hours these young ladies love acting. "I like the challenge of acting like someone that is completely different than me," Kristen explains. Courtney loves "the audiences ... talking, learning lines, and being in rehearsals." When they aren't acting, the two are typical, active teenagers. Kristen likes singing, playing soccer, softball and basketball, and hanging out with friends. Courtney enjoys cheerleading, soccer, gymnastics, and being with her friends. ★ —SL

Amber Waves

STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN BY
JANET ALLEN & SARA LOCKER

Farming in America Today

What are some of the conditions facing the Olson family in the play? Many historians believe that American farmers and their livelihoods are more endangered today than they have been for over thirty years. Nationwide, farmers' incomes dropped an average of 12% last year. And it's happening at a time when the country as a whole is enjoying its longest period of prosperity in more than 30 years. Farmers see and hear that news, and it makes their sense of failure feel worse. Prices paid for crops are at a record low (wheat prices are down 42% from their 1995 high; corn prices are down 38%), as bushels per acre yields are at a record high. Hi-tech machinery depreciates at a rate faster than farmers can pay off the loans that bought them. Various government subsidy programs for farmers (see the Freedom to Farm Act, 1996) manipulate the conditions but don't really change the facts. When weather conditions are good, American farmers produce more food than the market will bear, and they are not able to sell it competitively; when the weather conditions are bad, farmers with large loans (taken out to buy more land or better equipment) can suffer significant economic loss. National statistics suggest that as many as 50% of America's farmers are in serious financial trouble. And many farmers believe that no one is noticing their plight.

Many farmers can't afford to sell out and simply move into a city to find a job. Many owe more money to banks than they could make by selling off their land (its appreciated value would incur large tax bills), equipment, even the houses their families have lived in for generations. So they would emerge from their farms with more debt than they could ever expect to pay off. The alternative is to declare bankruptcy, but the result, in the words of one farmer is: "I'm going to hurt forever if I go through bankruptcy and people that I do business with—our neighbors and friends—would have to take a loss because of me. You know, that will stay with me forever. I know it will."

Let's look at some Indiana statistics: in 1964 there were 108,000 farms; in 1997 that number had decreased to 58,000, a decline of almost 50% in 31 years. But the average size of farms has increased from 166 acres to 261 acres, bearing out the national trend of fewer, larger farms (and fewer farmers needed to farm them as technology increases). In 1964 there were only 60 farms that had over 2000 acres; in 1997 there were 713. Hog production is down 20% in Indiana, compared against the national average of 4% decrease. Indiana's corn production in 1999 was down 2% from 1988; soy bean production was down 7%. Tobacco production was down 31%; hay production was down 10%.

With increased financial challenge in rural communities comes increased incidence of depression, suicide, spouse or child abuse, and chronic fatigue. Many families go without insurance in order to make ends meet. Many families re-label "essentials" like glasses, shoes, sleep, or even heat or electricity as "nonessentials."

One study done in the late 1980s in Iowa explores the effect

of economic depression on farm families:

Among many farm families, beliefs about the rewards of hard work have been challenged by continuing economic stress. Such a shattering of basic life assumptions clearly left families with a strong sense of vulnerability. Though families often talked about how working hard didn't pay off, they continued to work hard, often at second jobs off the farm. This contradiction raised a fundamental question. Children are hearing their parents verbalize how work is not being rewarded but are observing that they still work hard. What will be the consequences of these disparate messages for future generations of rural youth? Will they redefine the reward system or challenge the merit of work? Will the economic rural crisis of the eighties give birth to chronic mental health concerns?

A nine-year-old child from Nebraska recently wrote President Clinton a letter which read:

I am wondering if you could help me because I am worried. I want to farm when I grow up. My dad had to work another job so we could pay our bills to keep the farm. It makes me sad because I never see him. My grandpa has to sell part of his farm, and that makes me sad too. My grandpa, dad and me too just want to feed people. We're good at it. Here's what I want to know—farmers are having sales because they cannot live off the prices so low. I bet a lot of farmers would still be farming. Would you ask more people to care about the farmers who raise their food? Pray for us to help us get through this tough time. And we will pray for you to guide us.

Who is reporting this farm plight which is considered, by most historians, to be the worst since the 1930s depression? Neither the New York Times nor the Washington Post employ correspondents to cover agriculture anymore. In the last year, the three major television networks did a total of 1569 economy stories; of these, only 17 talked about the severe recession hitting farmers. ★ —JA

On the Web

There are a number of excellent web sites for learning more about farming. Some of them include:

Indiana Agricultural Statistics Services at

<http://info.aes.purdue.edu/agstat/nass.html>

The national agricultural magazine, *Ag Day*, has a web site at

<http://www.agday.org/>

Another interesting new web site called the "Drought Monitor" was developed at the University of Nebraska and is accessible at

<http://enso.unl.edu/monitor/>