

NO MAN'S LAND

GEORGE & GOODWIN

NO MAN'S LAND tells the story of a Faustian bargain made by a young farm girl during the Great Depression in Oklahoma's panhandle, exploring American desperation during the Dust Bowl: one of the top man-made climate disasters of all time.

Tilly dreams of going to college and escaping rural domestic life. She is gifted a golden locket from the family's migrant worker, Santi, as a promise he will come back for her. When Tilly's sister falls ill with dust pneumonia, Tilly gives away her golden heart to a suitcase farmer who promises her he can save Sissy's soul. This bargain creates a never ending rain, until Sissy must make the ultimate sacrifice for her family.

ACT I

Our opera begins with an optimistic chorus, gloating about the American dream and monetizing the untouched mid-Western land. Here we meet the White family, new settlers in No Man's Land, hot on the trails of the wheat trade. Tilly, the eldest daughter, scorns the countryside and longs to live in a big American city. She and her younger sister, Sissy, hear whispers at school about a big dust storm. Pa releases their migrant workers in anticipation of the storm. Before he leaves, Santi gives Tilly her first kiss and his heart of gold. As he leaves, Tilly grows ill with dust pneumonia and Ma spends the family's last bit of money on medical help for Tilly. Next, Sissy falls ill and there is no money left to save her. A suitcase farmer we have only seen lurking in the periphery, enters to speak with Tilly. He explains that her golden locket can save her sister's life. Heartbroken, she surrenders the locket and Sissy's life is saved, thus causing rain.

CAST

SISSY
soubrette
MA
lyric soprano
TILLY
mezzo-soprano
DEVIL
tenor
SANTI
tenor
PA
baritone

TOWNSPEOPLE/CHORUS
SATB; with solo
stand-out roles
for each voice type

ACT II

The chorus wails of an endless rain and everything is drowning. Pa visits the suitcase farmer and offers him his wife's wedding band, instructing him to do whatever he must to stop this rain. Sissy enters the dark barn with a lantern and rope, realizing the rain hasn't stopped falling since her miraculous recovery. Possessed, she hangs a noose from the beam. For her family and the farm's sake, she takes her own life. The rain stops. Tilly finds Sissy and the suitcase farmer in the barn. Tilly doesn't understand how her deal expired; she gave away her gold heart for Sissy's life. Santi enters the barn. Tilly begs him for his golden key, in hopes of saving Sissy like she has before. Santi asks where her locket is and Tilly desperately tries to explain, it makes no sense to him. Santi throws the key at her feet and leaves. As the morning sun rises, the chorus celebrates the end of the rain and better times ahead unaware of the largest loss of all

THE DUST BOWL & SUITCASE FARMERS

The Dust Bowl was a man-made climate disaster, born as a result of government greed to turn profit from indigenous grasslands into wheat fields. It was a business attempt to impose a system of agriculture to which the Plains are not adapted. And the land rebelled.

Our story's Devil disguises himself as a suitcase farmer; the real estate agents blamed for the Dust Bowl, betting thousands of dollars on rain and turning farmland into factory. These suitcase farmers outsourced labor and lived nowhere near the farms, so they were not physically effected by the devastation like the poor folk they hired.



THE CREATORS

George and Goodwin have worked together in a variety of musical mediums. Their initial artistic pairing began in 2018 with a commission from dell'Arte Opera Ensemble to write Princess Maleine for their 2019 summer season at the historic La MaMa Experimental Theatre.

Since, this duo have written an immersive opera, Fizz & Ginger, produced and performed in June of 2023 by their chamber ensemble The Curiosity Cabinet at The Comedy Cellar, the old site of the 1920's Palm Casino. This opera was picked up by Chicago Fringe Opera for May 2024 performances.

Throughout the pandemic, they created a tryptic of recorded radio dramas about pandemics past, HOME, AXEMAN, and PAPER DAUGHTER. These had their stage debut June 2024 at the Cell theatre, outfitted as a 1930s NBC studio.

George and Goodwin share the same artistic missions — create pieces with strong femme characters, explore socioeconomics in past and current American culture, establish art as activism.

INSTRUMENTATION

A CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA OF 7
PLAYERS

Piccolo/Flute
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

Trombone

Violin
Double Bass

Percussion
Piano

OPTIONAL
ARRANGEMENTS

Violin
& Piano
or

(Chamber or Full)
Orchestra
(15 piece minimum)

RUN TIME

120 minutes

LISTEN TO SAMPLES & FIND OUT MORE:

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