



Production Notes

Leaving Iowa is a memory play that weaves together past and present. In the premiere production at the Purple Rose Theatre, Director Tony Caselli chose to have Dad present on stage and in the car once Don begins his trip to his father's home town in Mount Union, Iowa. Thankfully, Dad did not come off as a ghost, but as a reassuring presence who represents the influence our parents leave inside all of us when they are gone. This choice also made for quick, smooth transitions and kept this sentimental comedy squarely where it needed to be: in the mind of Don and in the heart of a father who tried too hard. Also, it's important to realize that Don's memories are not reality, but fond exaggerations of his pain and his love of these trips. Be bold in both the play's emotion and in its silliness. Perhaps one director said it best: "*Leaving Iowa* felt and moved like a classic musical to me. The songs just happen to be in the words and images and the story is more of an idealized memory, which feels like a warm funny dream you wake up from and smile."

Here are some practical suggestions:

1. Don't play the movement in the car literally. The flashbacks are to create the feeling of sheer chaos or a moment on a postcard. We highly encourage productions to think of LI as a well-choreographed comedic opera while never setting aside the small, simple, and idiosyncratic of character.
2. Make sure the kids in the back seat sit high enough above Mom and Dad so we can see their reactions.
3. We encourage a simple choice when considering the car itself, such as the use of four stools or boxes. The boxes have proven to be more sturdy, allowing for strong physical play, but both have been successful.
4. A minimalist approach to the set seems to serve the play best, highlighting character over time-consuming set changes, with actors themselves moving set pieces on, off and around the stage as they perform.
5. Some versions have made use of a cap for Don to help indicate him switching from past to present.
6. The part of Don, with abrupt transitions from past to present, adult to child, is one of the more challenging aspects of the play. An option conceived by a creative high school director made the part of Don easier to handle for less experienced troupes. He casted two different actors, one played adult Don, and one played child Don.

Also, the use of specific sounds and an original music score fill a critical and invaluable role in bringing this travel play to life and help pull Don and the story fluidly and effortlessly from scene to scene. A simple car pass adds invaluable information in many ways. We have more than 130 sound cues that we will make available to you that have been crafted and refined over the different productions. They are the glue that holds the story together.



The Cast

Leaving Iowa can be performed with a minimal ensemble cast of six actors, but can utilize as many as many as 27 performers by casting multiple character parts separately.

DON BROWNING Adult writer, young boy in flashbacks

DAD Don's father

MOM Don's mother, past and present

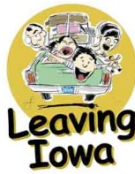
SISTER Don's sister, past and present

MULTIPLE CHARACTER GUY (in order of appearance)

BOB	Hog farmer
UNCLE PHIL	Don's uncle
FRUIT CART GUY	A man with a vegetable stand
GRANDPA	Don's grandfather
CART CHASER	Grocery store employee
JOE HOFINGERS	Farmer with hoe
AMISH PEDDLER	Amish guy at Flea Market
CIVIL WAR GUY	Civil War performer/narrator at museum
JACK SINGER	Don's childhood professor
FRED (MECHANIC)	Fixes Don's car
PARK RANGER	Park Ranger at Ghost Caverns
HOTEL CLERK	Unhappy old man
WAYNE	Stoic waiter with mullet
BOB	Hog farmer

MULTIPLE CHARACTER GAL (in order of appearance)

JUDY	Hog farmer Bob's wife
AUNT PHYLLIS	Don's aunt
FRUIT CART GAL	Co-owner of fruit cart, wife of Fruit Cart Guy (optional)
GRANDMA	Don's grandmother
SHOPPING LADY	Woman in grocery store parking lot
AMISH WIFE	Amish lady at flea market
MUSEUM ASSISTANT	Assistant to Civil War Guy
JAMIE (MECHANIC)	Works with Fred at auto repair shop
DRUNK LADY	Patron in hotel
JESSIE	Nightmare waitress
JUDY	Hog farmer Bob's wife



The Set

Some productions have incorporated more elaborate set elements than others; others have been intentionally sparse. The show has been produced on both proscenium and thrust stages. It adapts well to either.

These are some of the more essential pieces that need to be considered:

GENERAL SETUP

- **PROJECTION SCREENS:** It works well to have three projection screens on stage. Two on either side can be used to display the various billboards and signage, while the center screen can be used for backdrop and scene-setting images.
- **THE CAR:** The most versatile car has been made of boxes, two (2) for the front seat (approx 16" sq) and a back seat that is a bench (36" high, 24" deep, 48" wide). Stools have also been used. The most critical aspect is to make certain the back seat is significantly higher than the front seat to make the children visible to the audience. It helps to think of the car as more than just a car; the elements that make up the car are really a multi-level playing area that can be adapted to a variety of purposes. It can be a park, a bar, an Amish flea market, or a mechanic shop as needed. There may also be a steering wheel that the characters can pass back and forth as needed. (The character who is driving generally rests the steering wheel on his or her lap.) Whether or not to use a physical steering wheel, as opposed to miming it, is an important choice each production must make for itself.

ACT I

- **FENCE:** It's been everything from a small piece of picket fence that is held by actors to an actual picket fence that is part of the set.
- **GROCERY CART:** An actual grocery cart; can be the smaller drug store size.
- **PHONE NOOK:** An area for Mom, used four (4) times; quick on and off.
- **BAR SCENE:** Several options here; Jack and Don can stand behind the back seat of the car holding beers, as if they're in a bar, or they can use a little bar table that flops out, with bar stools. Some people choose to make use of the bar in Act I, and then again in the Act II diner scene.

ACT II

- **HOTEL DESK FOR CLERK:** Can be a flip-down desk or a roll-out desk. Whatever it is, a brochure rack is a welcome touch, as opposed to the brochures lying on the counter.
- **DINER:** Again, the back seat has been used, or whatever setup is used for the bar scene can serve for the diner as well. **Note:** Don needs to be facing out to audience.
- **CENTER POLE:** Can be a variety of poles, depending on important factors such as how it is brought on, and whether or not the car is cleared away for the final scene. Regardless, the pole must have a sign on it: "THE CENTER—YOU ARE HERE."