

PNT's "Dead Man's Shoes," is an unlikely, lyrical Western

By [Patty Nolan](#), Detroit Theater Examiner

The most unbelievable aspect of [Joseph Zettelmaier's](#) new play is the historical part.

Dead Man's Shoes takes its theme from the macabre-but-true story of [Big Nose George Parrott](#), a cattle rustler from the 19th century Wild West whose skin was made into a pair of shoes after he was lynched by a mob eager for the reward money.

The second most unbelievable aspect of this play is that it's pretty darn funny. Laugh-out-loud funny. Even the dark parts. Especially the dark parts.

Dead Man's Shoes officially opened last night at [Performance Network Theatre](#) and runs through April 8, 2012. The show is a co-production with the [Williamston Theatre](#), where it ran to rave reviews.

There is so much to admire about this production.

The play is directed by Performance Network Artistic Director David Wolber, who has premiered five of Zettelmaier's works and is adept at finding all the humor and humanity in these remarkable stories.

The small cast is perfect. Aral Gribble (*Man of La Mancha*, *The Home Team*) plays Froggy, an out-of-luck Civil War reject who tries to befriend the ruthless outlaw Injun Bill Picote. Injun Bill, played by Drew Parker (*Marie Antoinette: The Color of Flesh*) is on a quest to get the man who turned his friend into a pair of saddle shoes. Paul Hopper (*Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol*) and Maggie Meyer (*Crimes of the Heart* and *Rabbit Hole* at Tipping Point Theatre) play all of the other roles, including the balladeers who perform bits of song that piece together the crazy-quilt story. The music is essential to the storytelling nature of this unlikely Western, and Zettelmaier wrote clever lyrics for "The Ballad of Injun Bill," with music composed by [The Potter's Field](#), a local folk band featuring Rochelle Clark and John Natiw.

The scenic design by Kirk Domer is another delight. In an era of high-definition projection scenery and flashy special effects, his scrolling, sketchbook-like backdrop is mesmerizing – and perfectly organic to the 1880s setting. We had to ask – and David Wolber estimated for us that the entire fabric mural is approximately 150 yards long. That's a lot of scenery, and it's lovingly rolled out over the course of this picaresque adventure of revenge.

Weekly performances of *Dead Man's Shoes* are Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m., with 3 p.m. Saturday matinees on March 31 and April 7.

Tickets can be ordered at the Performance Network Box Office at 734-663-0681, [online](#) or by coming to the Performance Network Theatre (120 East Huron St., Ann Arbor, 48104). Tickets are priced at \$22 - \$41, with discounts available for seniors, members, students and groups.

Dead Man's Shoes contains adult language and themes and is not suitable for those under age 17.



(L to R) Aral Gribble, Drew Parker and Maggie Meyer in "Dead Man's Shoes."

Credits: Chris Purchis



Slideshow: [Dead Man's Shoes](#)



Video: [The Ballad of Injun Bill](#)

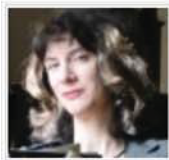
Rating for Dead Man's Shoes:



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[Dead Man's Shoes](#) | March 16, 2012



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