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REVIEW: "Dead Man's Shoes"

WilliamstonTheatre & Performance Network
Theatre
From the New Monitor

dead body of his former partner in crime by dissecting it and making a pair of shoes out of the skin of his feet.

While spending some time in a lockup, Picote acquires a sidekick, an amiable overweight thief nicknamed Froggy (Aral Gribble). Froggy is the exact opposite of Picote, a chatterbox who eschews violence. And though this is a Western without as much as one single horse with which to carry our crusader, it's easy to imagine the potbellied Froggy playing Sancho Panza to Picote's tall and lean Don Quixote. Together, the two set out in search of their prey, who, it's rumored, may have become the governor of Montana.

Like all good westerns, there's lots of meandering about the wide open spaces, accomplished on the limited space of the Williamston stage by an ingenious scrolling canvas that provides a backdrop representative of wherever the two crusaders find themselves at the time.

Along the way, Picote and Froggy meet an array of characters, all played by two actors, Paul Hopper and Maggie Meyer, who also serve as cowboy muses at critical junctures in the show.

Picote and Froggy's trek includes stops at a small town boarding house, a brothel run by a horny Madame (who bears a remarkable resemblance to the aforementioned Paul Hopper), and a train ride while sporting shackles.

Zettelmaier, who always manages to create memorable scenes, is never afraid to inject another dimension into his story. Here he adds a mysterious character named Death, wearing white against cliché and bent on causing as much destruction as he can.

"Dead Man's Shoes" is directed by David Wolber, the artistic director of Performance Network Theatre in Ann Arbor, which is where this show goes after finishing its Williamston run. Wolber has cast wisely, with each of the four actors a standout in their own right while fitting seamlessly into the ensemble. Scenic design is by Kirk Damer, with costumes by Amber Marisa Cook.

"Dead Man's Shoes" is an intelligent mix of story, character and humor. It's an old-time western with contemporary sensibilities, and the journey that it recounts is well worth the taking.

SHOW DETAILS: "Dead Man's Shoes" runs through Feb. 26. The Williamston Theatre is located at 122 S. Putnam in downtown Williamston, about ten miles east of Lansing. Tickets are available by calling 517-655-7469. Further information is available at www.williamstontheatre.org. Performance Network's production is scheduled to run March 16-April 8. For more information: www.performancenetwork.org.

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Performance Information

Show times

Thursday, January 26, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Friday, January 27, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Saturday, January 28, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Sunday, January 29, 2012 at 2:00 pm
Thursday, February 2, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Friday, February 3, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Saturday, February 4, 2012 at 3:00 pm
Saturday, February 4, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Sunday, February 5, 2012 at 2:00 pm
Thursday, February 9, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Friday, February 10, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Saturday, February 11, 2012 at 3:00 pm
Saturday, February 11, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Sunday, February 12, 2012 at 2:00 pm
Thursday, February 16, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Friday, February 17, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Saturday, February 18, 2012 at 3:00 pm
Saturday, February 18, 2012 at 8:00 pm
Sunday, February 19, 2012 at 2:00 pm
Thursday, February 23, 2012 at 8:00 pm

Stage western without the cliches

By Daniel Skora

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Playwright Joseph Zettelmaier has crafted another in a growing list of hit shows, this time a tale set in the American West of the 1880s. "Dead Man's Shoes," a dark comedy about one man's search for revenge, is currently having its world premiere at the Williamston Theatre.

Though it's tough to do any kind of Western without falling prey to at least a few of the old clichés, Zettelmaier manages to keep his distance and concentrates instead on his characters and the story he has to tell. The story concerns itself with Injun Bill Picote (Drew Parker), a man of few words and an outlaw who's done more than his share of robbing and killing. Picote is on a mission to find the man who violated the