

Dr. Balthasar's Traveling Medicine Show will cure what ails you

By Lisa Britton
Go! Magazine

BAKER CITY — Dr. Balthasar rolls into town this weekend to hawk his miracle medicine that cures anything that ails his listeners.

Does it work? Well, the good doctor's grin and slick salesman pitch might give you a clue.

Mike Follin has portrayed Dr. Balthasar for 40 years, and he's brought the show to Baker City since the early 1990s when he first came to the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.

His next visit to Baker County will be Aug. 12-15. Performances begin at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, 5 miles east of Baker City on Highway 82. The shows will be outside because the center is closed.

Follin will give an extra show at 5 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 14, at Geiser-Pollman Park in Baker City.

All performances are free. Follin lives 45 miles north of

Columbus, Ohio. It took a bit of convincing to bring him from Ohio to Baker City the first time, but he's returned every year since 1993.

"That started a long and wonderful relationship with Baker City," he said. "Over the years I've made some wonderful friends."

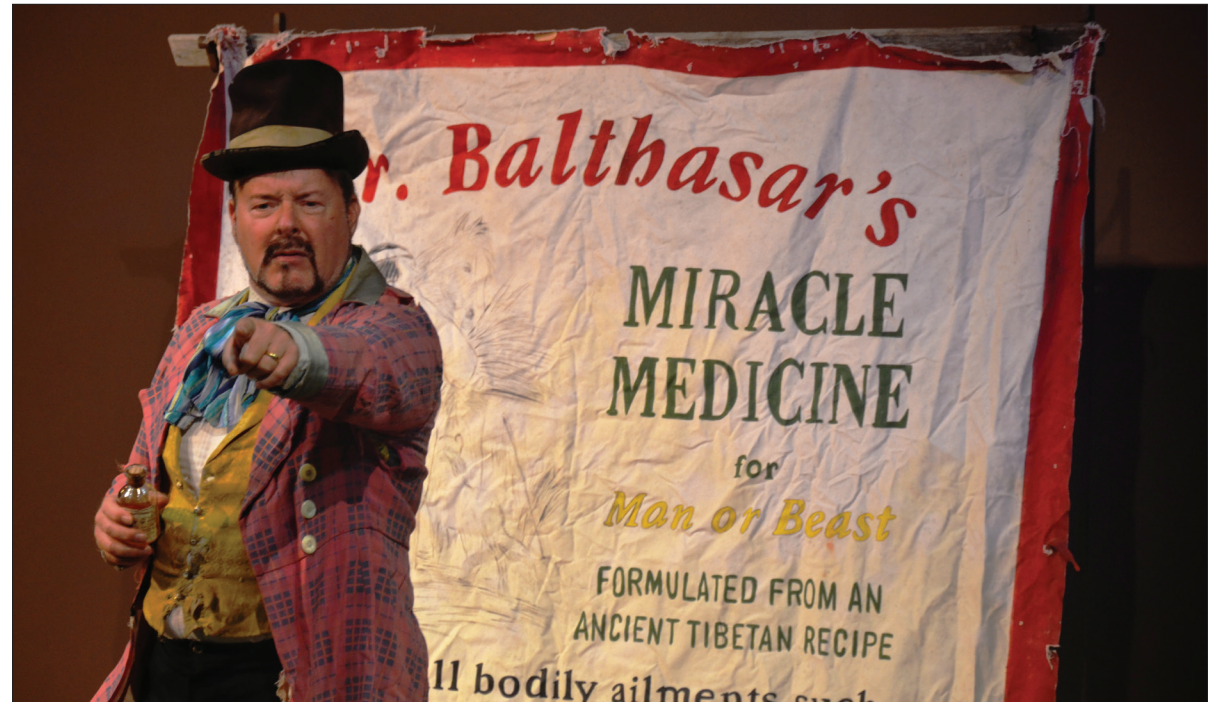
Follin worked as an education interpreter for the Ohio Historical Society. He developed the character of Dr. Balthasar 40 years ago for a summer program. He did research for about six months, and plucked the name Balthasar from a Cincinnati newspaper printed in the 1820s.

"I wanted to pick a name that was equivalent to a medicine man," he said.

His miracle medicine show was slated for just one year.

"It was supposed to be for one summer," he said. "Then the next summer, and the next summer. Then it was discovered by other sites."

He's traveled his show east to Delaware, south to Texas, north to Michigan and west as far as Baker City.



Travel Baker County
Mike Follin performs as Dr. Balthasar Aug. 12-15 in Baker City.

At least, that's as far as he's been within the United States. Dr. Balthasar also has been to England, Ireland and Japan.

Follin laughs as he recounts the Japanese visit because the first show's intent was lost in translation. He realized this when

he finished and the audience was silent.

"There were crickets. I thought, 'This is going to be the longest month of my life,'" he said.

But then one man raised his hand and, through the translator,

began to describe his aches and pains for Dr. Balthasar.

To prepare for his remaining shows in Japan, Follin said he spent the next two days memorizing 80% of the show in Japanese. The rest of his performances went much better, he said.

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