

'The Ballad of Black Bart'

Catch the comedy Saturdays in Pendleton

By Jennifer Colton
Go! Magazine

PENDLETON — The masked bandit Black Bart has been terrorizing downtown Pendleton all summer, and there are only a few weeks left to see how the Clarence Knob Traveling Theater Company brings him down in "The Ballad of Black Bart (or Ladies Get the Last Word)."

The free comedy Wild West Show almost didn't happen this year, and it would not have happened if Margaret Mayer, department director for fine arts at Blue Mountain Community College, hadn't planned, written the script and had a cast on board in less than a week.

When Mayer was contacted about a 15-minute show for Pendleton's Wild West Weekends, organizers were only days away from the first Saturday



Jennifer Colton/Go! Magazine
The narrator (Chris Dennett, right) introduces Sheriff Buck (Terry Hale, left) while Margaret Mayer plays the accordion in this summer's Western comedy "The Ballad of Black Bart" in downtown Pendleton.

event. Even with the tight deadline, she agreed to try.

"It had been too long since we'd done anything with live theater," she said. "I called Doreen (Matteson), and she was crazy enough to agree to it. I called Terry (Hale), and he was in. We put the cast together, and we wrote it."

The cast agreed on Thursday. Mayer worked with her longtime collaborator Marcia Brown on

the plot and wrote the script on Saturday. She sent the script to Hale on Sunday, and the first rehearsal was on Monday. Wednesday morning, the cast presented it to the Pendleton Chamber, and Black Bart was a go.

The final show brings together a small but talented cast, including Hale, Elgin Opera House artistic director, as Buck, the local sheriff, and Matteson, the

treasurer of College Community Theater, as Loretta, the owner of the local saloon. Mayer handles musical accompaniment as the accordion player, and actor Chris Dennett serves as both the narrator and Black Bart himself. To find out who plays the new singer at Loretta's saloon, Miss Fancy, you'd have to see the play in person.

The family-friendly show is part comedy, part musical and part spaghetti Western.

"Everything has been so down and dark that I just wanted to do something funny — something that was uplifting and would make everyone laugh and forget about their troubles," Mayer said.

Judging from the response of audiences so far, Mayer has met that goal — even with the tribulations of street theater. The actors have had to improvise around loud traffic, trains, wind and people walking through the set in the middle of the show. Hale said when they agreed, they weren't sure what to expect.

"THE BALLAD OF BLACK BART (OR LADIES GET THE LAST WORD)"

4 p.m. and 5 p.m. Saturdays through Sept. 4
Main Street, Pendleton
Free

"We were rehearsing and imagining us being out and performing with no audience or having one person walk by and sit down," he said. "It's been a pleasant surprise to have so many people. We've had some great audiences."

The cast said audiences should plan to laugh and be part of the show — from their seats.

"When people come out, they should know they're invited to be a part of the show, and that it will bring a smile to their face," Matteson said. "After months and months of isolation, it is so nice to see everyone out enjoying themselves."

"The Ballad of Black Bart (or Ladies Get the Last Word)" goes on at 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. Saturdays on Main Street in Pendleton. The show will run through Sept. 4.

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