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Dramatic Publishing

"A rip-snorting tale full of fun and thrills!"

Cleveland Call and Post



PECOS BILL

and the

GHOST STAMPEDE

Comedy/Adventure by Eric Coble

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PECOS BILL and the GHOST STAMPEDE

Comedy/Adventure. By Eric Coble.

Cast: 2m., 2w. (extras to 7,000 actors—a large herd of cattle). Let's get larger than life! When the biggest herd of cattle west of the Mississippi disappears during the worst drought in history, it's weird. But when that herd transforms into ghosts, leveling everything in its path ... well, now we're into Pecos Bill tall-tale country. Young Missy Cougar-Wildcat has always wished she could live an adventure as big as her home state, and when the roughest, rowdiest cowboy of all enters her world, she quickly finds herself up to her braids in a brand new hoot-n-holler legend packed with action, laughs ... and the world's largest prairie dog! "With one layer of action appealing to kids, the next layer amusing adults, it's a fast-paced whimsical romp that will electrify imaginations." (Akron Beacon Journal) Area staging. Approximate running time: 50 minutes.

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Pecos Bill and the Ghost Stampede

A Play

by

ERIC COBLE



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Pecos Bill and the Ghost Stampede premiered at The Cleveland Play House on January 22, 2002 (Peter Hackett, artistic director; Dean R. Gladden, managing director). William Hoffman was the director with scene design by Anna C. Goller, lighting design by Maureen Patterson and costume design by Kazuko Inoue.

CAST

Pa JAMES MANGO
Missy LIZ DUCHEZ
Ma, Enny REBECCA CASTLE
Pecos Bill. MICHAEL MUELLER

PECOS BILL AND THE GHOST STAMPEDE

A Play in One Act
For 2 Men and 2 Women, extras

CHARACTERS

PA A man who loves his guitar, ranch and family.

MA A woman trying to survive.

MISSY A girl trying to be as big as her state.

PECOS BILL A man bigger than any state.

VARIOUS ANIMALS

PLACE: The West.

TIME: The early days of Texas.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play can be performed by 4-7 actors, and should feel like an adventure told by children, making it up as they go. The set is minimal for maximum room for the imagination, and props should be as creative as possible, using puppets, cloth and costume pieces to create spectacular theatrical effects.

There is an alternate opening for the show at the end of the playbook, for theatres wishing for more audience participation by way of having the audience become the huge herd of cattle. Whatever ropes your horns.

PECOS BILL AND THE GHOST STAMPEDE

SETTING: *A bare stage, with perhaps several different levels, representing different parts of Texas and Louisiana.*

AT RISE: *A man walks onstage in a cowboy hat, strumming a guitar. This is PA.*

PA. Once upon a time...way way back in the day when you could see the red soil before it was covered with pavement, cement, firmament, and detriment, back when the sky was clean and clear of electric lines, telephone lines and oil pipelines, back in the day when coyotes outnumbered people thirty-four to one, back in the day when you loved your horse like a brother, and if you was lucky your horse wasn't your brother...there was a land. A land much loved and feared where thousands of people flocked because it offered one thing and one thing only...it was empty. Now there's nothin' a human bein' finds more fascinatin' than a place where there's no human bein's. So they started comin' to this land and bringin' their livestock and their cornstalks and their old socks...and they realized they needed a name for this great big empty place—a great big ol' name for a great

big ol' plain...Texas. Nice ring to it, don't it? And an amazing thing about Texas...things grow here. And I don't mean just beans and sheep. I mean we got the biggest prairies and the biggest cattle and the biggest hats and boots and spurs...the biggest everything!

(A girl in plain Western clothes trudges onstage wiping sweat from her brow. This is MISSY.)

MISSY. 'Cept me.

PA. Why, I even got the grandest, smartest, fastest daughter west of Ohio!

MISSY. Pa, you know that ain't true. I'm just a kid. Just an ordinary, plain old kid...in a land where everything's bigger 'n' faster 'n' the best west of Missouri.

PA. Well, you're the prettiest.

MISSY. Pa.

PA. You can holler the loudest.

MISSY. Not louder than Bessy Gulchwater over in San Antone.

PA. Your feet are pretty big...

MISSY. Nothin' about me is larger than life. Just once I wish I could do somethin' big. I want my life to be huge, Pa, I want my life to be the size of Texas!

(MA enters, wiping sweat from her neck and carrying a bucket of chicken feed.)

MA. Well, you're livin' through a Texas-sized drought—ain't that good enough for ya? *(PA hits a sour note on his guitar.)*

PA. Longest, hottest, driest spell this land's ever seen.

MA. Look at that sun. I never seen a bigger ball of cracklin' flame in all my life. You can hear the plants dryin' up and crumblin'...

MISSY. I can't hardly think, it's so hot.

PA. Yeah, but it's a dry heat.

MISSY (*flopping on the ground*). I can't hardly swallow, my throat's so dry...my skin's gettin' as cracked as the earth around here—

MA. The grass is yellow...

MISSY. Or dead. (*PA hits a sad note.*)

MA. The beans and corn are withering...

MISSY. Or dead. (*Another sad note.*)

MA. Not too long 'til our family will be movin' on...

MISSY. Or dead. (*PLUNK. PA stops playing.*) Pa, play us somethin' to cheer us up.

MA. Your father's got more important things to do around the ranch, sweetheart, and so do you— (*Starts scattering feed.*)

PA. I got time for a song for my darlin' daughter. A little somethin' to beat the heat...

MISSY. Play somethin' cool, Pa.

PA (*strumming and singing*). "Wellll...my mouth's so dry, it's like I'm chewin' cotton—"

MISSY. How 'bout a different song?

PA (*a different tune*). "Sun overhead, boilin' me alive, Peelin' off my skin, think I might just die—"

MISSY. Know anything else?

PA (*a different tune*). "Sizzle, sizzle, sizzle-ee... Is that bacon I smell, or is it me?"

MISSY (*puts her hand on his guitar to stop him*). Pa. Maybe Ma's right. You have more important things to do than play for me.

PA. I'm sorry. Those are the only songs I can think of.

Heat must be gettin' to me.

MISSY. It'll be okay. We just have to wait it out. See those clouds? We just gotta wait 'til they decide to pour a mess of rain down on us. It'll be okay, Pa.

PA. Oh, I know we'll make it somehow, sugar lumps. It's the cattle I'm worried about.

MISSY. Oh my gosh! The cattle! Encephalitis!

MA. What?

MISSY. I gotta go feed Encephalitis!

MA. That cow Pa gave you as a pet?

PA. You named her Encephalitis?

MISSY. Sure.

PA. What kind of name is that?

MISSY. I think it's perty. En-seff-a-lite-us. Sounds like an Egyptian princess, don't it?

MA. She's a cow, honey.

PA (*to MA*). Was she this way before the heat wave?
(*MISSY runs off, circles the stage, grabbing a bucket as MA and PA exit.*)

MISSY. Enny? Ennyyyy? I got some grain for ya! Here you are!

(The actors who were MA and PA pull a large cow suit over themselves and step forward, looking like one hot, tired bovine.)

MISSY (*cont'd*). How you doin', girl?

ENNY. Moo.

MISSY. Surprised you ain't turned into a grilled steak from all this heat.

ENNY. Moo.

MISSY. I got ya a little grain I took from the chickens.
Don't tell.

ENNY. Moo.

MISSY. And here— (*Holding up a tin cup.*) I saved my
water from breakfast. I figure you need it more than me.

ENNY. Moo! (*ENNY drinks eagerly—one gulp and it's
gone. She and MISSY look in the empty cup...at each
other...*)

MISSY. I was kind of hopin' you'd save a little for me.

ENNY (*cuddling her*). Moo.

MISSY. You old cow. We'll be okay. You'll see. Heat
can't last forever, can it?

MAN'S VOICE BEHIND HER. Heck, no!

*(She and ENNY jump and turn to see a wild, cheerful
man in cowboy clothes, wiping sweat from his forehead
and underarms. This would be PECOS BILL.)*

MISSY. Who are you?

BILL. Pecos Bill. (*Offering a hand.*) 'Scuse the smell. (*To
ENNY.*) How you doin', ma'am?

ENNY. Moo.

MISSY. ...Bill? You're Pecos Bill??

BILL. That's what it says in my hat.

MISSY. The Pecos Bill raised by coyotes?

BILL. Every Mother's Day, I call up to say "Aooooo"!

MISSY. The Pecos Bill who used a rattlesnake as a lasso??

BILL. Hey, I was raised by coyotes, what did I know about
rope?

MISSY. The Pecos Bill who rode a wild panther for a
horse?