

DEAD
MAN'S
SHOES

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Dead Man's Shoes

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DEAD
MAN'S
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A PLAY BY

JOSEPH ZETTELMAIER



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Dead Man's Shoes premiered as a co-production between Williamston Theatre (Williamston, MI) and the Performance Network Theatre (Ann Arbor, MI). It opened at Williamston Theatre on January 26, 2014. The production was directed by David Wolber. Set Design by Kirk Domer. Costume Design by Amber Marisa Cook. Lighting Design by Daniel C. Walker. Sound Design by Will Myers. Prop Design by Stefanie Din. Technical Direction by Ed Weingart. The production was stage managed by Rochelle Clark.

The cast was as follows:

INJUN BILL PICOTE: DREW PARKER

FROGGY: ARAL BASIL GRIBBLE II

ACTOR 1: PAUL HOPPER

ACTOR 2: MAGGIE MEYER

“The Ballad of Injun Bill” - Lyrics by Joseph Zettelmaier.
Original music by Rochelle Clark and John Natiw.

NOTE: It is the playwright's intention that each production can compose their own music around the lyrics, as best suits the production.

DEAD MAN'S SHOES WAS THE RECIPIENT OF AN EDGERTON FOUNDATION NEW AMERICAN PLAY AWARD IN 2013.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

INJUN BILL PICOTE, 35, an outlaw

FROGGY, 30s, an army cook

ACTOR 1: SHERIFF, MADAME FLORA, ABEL,

DEATH

ACTOR 2: SISTER BERNADETTE, BELLE,

BJARMA, MARTHA

TIME

1883

PLACE

Various locales in the Western United States

ACT I

SCENE 1

(ACTORS 1 and 2 are illuminated. They speak the first part of the ballad out loud)

ACTOR 1

GATHER 'ROUND, ALL YOU SINNERS
AND TALL-TALE SPINNERS
GATHER 'ROUND, ALL YOU TRAV'LERS
AND SIT FOR A SPELL

ACTOR 2

LET THE FIRE HERE WARM YOU
WHILE WE PLAYERS INFORM YOU
OF A BLACK-HEARTED SCOUNDREL
COME STRAIGHT OUT OF HELL

ACTOR 1

T'WAS A MURDEROUS LIAR
WHO ATE COAL AND CRAPPED FIRE

ACTOR 2

WITH A BELLY FOR VENGEANCE
HE NEVER COULD FILL

ACTOR 1

AND HE WANDERED THE WEST
DOIN' WHAT HE DID BEST

ACTOR 2

THE VILLAINOUS OUTLAW
THEY CALLED INJUN BILL.

(The music plays. ACTOR 1 sings)

ACTOR 1

IN A DARK AND RUN-DOWN PRISON
IN THE HEART OF NORTH DAKOTA
SAT THE SON OF THE LAKOTA
WITH THE DEVIL IN HIS EYES
HE SPENT TWO YEARS IN THE SADDLE
FIGHTIN' HIS OWN PRIVATE BATTLE
AND IT LANDED HIM IN JAIL,
ONE STEP FURTHER FROM HIS PRIZE

INJUN BILL, INJUN BILL

THINK ON THIS BEFORE YOU SLAUGHTER
EVERY GIRL IS SOMEONE'S DAUGHTER,
EVERY MAN IS SOMEONE'S SON

INJUN BILL, INJUN BILL

LET YOUR BETTER ANGELS GUIDE YOU
'CAUSE THE DEVIL THAT'S INSIDE YOU
WANTS HIS DUE BEFORE IT'S DONE

(Lights rise. A prison in North Dakota. It's dirty & dark. There are two cells, with bars separating them. In one sits INJUN BILL PICOTE, a hat over his face making it unclear if he's sleeping or not. In the other is FROGGY, playing a harmonica. He is a large man with a moustache wearing a ragged shirt, a forage cap & military pants. FROGGY finishes his song. After a moment--)

INJUN BILL

Don't stop.

(Beat. FROGGY just stares at him)

INJUN BILL

I said don't stop. *(Beat)* You deaf and ugly, or just ugly?

(Beat. FROGGY laughs at that)

FROGGY

You a funny som'bitch, ain'tcha?

(INJUN BILL shrugs)

FROGGY

In there for two days, you ain't said one word. Hell, you farted in your sleep and I thought we was about to have a conversation. Sittin' there for two days and all you gots to say is "Don't stop?"

INJUN BILL

This isn't a social club.

FROGGY

Just a neighborly howdy-do is all I ask.

(INJUN BILL says nothing)

FROGGY

What'cha in for?

INJUN BILL

Being sloppy.

FROGGY

That's a crime? Shit, I been sloppy since I came outta my momma.

INJUN BILL

Got drunk. Got caught.

FROGGY

Gettin' tore up ain't a crime.

INJUN BILL

Cut a man up.

FROGGY

That a fact?

INJUN BILL

It is.

FROGGY

Yeah, I can see the law frownin' on that. What'd he do?

INJUN BILL

Wore the wrong shoes.

(Beat)

FROGGY

Huh. Wrong shoes?

INJUN BILL

That's right.

FROGGY

I reckon I don't follow.

INJUN BILL

Not my concern.

FROGGY

You carved some poor som'bitch up 'cause he was wearing the wrong shoes?

INJUN BILL

Would've been worse if he was wearin' the right ones.

FROGGY

Mister, I can't quite decide if you're crazy or just puttin' me on.

INJUN BILL

That's not my concern either.

FROGGY

My gut tells me "crazy". And I'm a man who goes with his gut.

INJUN BILL

Obviously.

(Beat)

FROGGY

You sayin' I'm fat?

INJUN BILL

You're saying you're fat. I'm just seeing it.

FROGGY

Why don't you smart-ass your way over here and say that to my face?

INJUN BILL

Nope.

FROGGY

You gutless?

INJUN BILL

I just wanted to hear more mouth-harp. You gonna play or not?

(FROGGY lifts his leg and farts)

FROGGY

That's a song I wrote special, just for you.

(Beat. INJUN BILL gets deadly serious)

INJUN BILL

Where you get your shoes?

(Beat)

FROGGY

What?

INJUN BILL

See them things on your feet? Those are shoes.
Where'd you get 'em?

FROGGY

(Crossing to the bars) Your mama give 'em to me
for a job well-done.

*(With surprising speed, INJUN BILL runs to the bars
and grabs FROGGY's ankles, tips FROGGY over,
and pulls off his shoes. FROGGY squeals with fear)*

FROGGY

AH! AH! Save me, Jesus! This som'bitch gonna
cut off my feet!

*(The SHERIFF walks in as INJUN BILL exam-
ines the shoes)*

SHERIFF

Hey! People are trying to sleep here!

FROGGY

Sheriff, that som'bitch stole my shoes and tried
to....

SHERIFF

Oh fer... just give him his shoes back already.

INJUN BILL

Make me.

FROGGY

Yeah! Make him!

SHERIFF

(Lowering his head) I tell ya, after everything we've been through, havin' you as my guests these past days... I had hoped you'd find yourselves more agreeable.

FROGGY

I want another cell.

SHERIFF

Ain't got one. *(Sits)* "If you chase two rabbits, you shall catch neither." That's a Russian proverb, ladies. Means if you want too much, you wind up with nothin' at all.

FROGGY

You sure that's...?

SHERIFF

I'm a student of philosophy myself. Somethin' about swimmin' through the great minds of the past, seein' how they reflect upon these times we live in... makes me feel a certain... connectedness. For example... *(He rises, crosses towards them)* You men...you in dire circumstances.

FROGGY

We ain't even gone to trial yet!

SHERIFF

Surely, surely. But 'round here, not many do. Fella gets a drunk on, gets a lynch mob rollin'... and I'm just one man here, ladies. If they come to hang ya, I'm not likely to stop them.

FROGGY
WHAT?!

SHERIFF

This is my conundrum. For reasons passing all logic, I've taken something of a shine to you two butt-flaps. I look at you, and I see the failure of the human condition. And I'm reminded of something Hippocrates said. "Extreme remedies are appropriate for extreme diseases."

FROGGY

We ain't sick!

SHERIFF

A hangin' won't help you boys, so I ask myself... what would prove an effective remedy?

FROGGY

Lettin' us go?

SHERIFF

Nothing short of a sign from God would possess me to do that.

FROGGY

Then at least put me somewhere else! I don't wanna be next to this foot-cuttin' som'bitch.

SHERIFF

Pigs don't wanna sleep in shit, and yet they do. You think on that.

(A knock at the door)

MABEL

(offstage) Sheriff!

SHERIFF

Ladies, if you'll excuse me. What is it, Mabel?

(He leaves)

FROGGY

You gonna try to kill me again?

INJUN BILL

Didn't try to kill you before.

FROGGY

I was just trying to make conversation before. You didn't have to get all surly.

INJUN BILL

I don't care.

FROGGY

I feel like we got off on the wrong foot. *(Beat)* Yep. The wrong foot. *(Beat)* Can I have my shoes back?

(INJUN BILL tosses him his shoes. FROGGY inspects them)

FROGGY

You sure these are my shoes?

INJUN BILL

Yep.

FROGGY

'Cause I can't see real good in the dark.

INJUN BILL

Yep.

FROGGY

I ain't so sure.

INJUN BILL

I don't care.

FROGGY

I'm real familiar with my odors. These don't smell

right.

INJUN BILL

(Temper rising) Who's shoes you think they are, jackass? It's just you and me here!

FROGGY

Coulda give me your shoes.

INJUN BILL

Why. Would I do that?

FROGGY

'Cause... um... 'cause my shoes are better?

(INJUN BILL walks to the bars, puts his boot up)

INJUN BILL

These are genuine shitkickers! What you got are two snot-rags tied 'round a sole! So why don't you shut the fuck up and...!

(FROGGY runs over, grabs INJUN BILL's boot, and flips him over. INJUN BILL lies there for a long time saying nothing. Finally--)

INJUN BILL

Reckon I had that coming.

FROGGY

Reckon you did.

INJUN BILL

Yep.

FROGGY

You ain't mad?

INJUN BILL

Should be. But I ain't.

FROGGY

Why not? *(He thinks about it)*

INJUN BILL

Hmmm.

(The SHERIFF enters, excited and carrying a telegram)

SHERIFF

Ladies... I... huh... I got a situation. This here telegram says... ah.... *(He drops the keys just out of the men's reach)* Best of luck! *(He giggles excitedly then bolts out the door)*

(FROGGY and INJUN BILL stare at the keys)

FROGGY

What the hell was that?

INJUN BILL

No idea.

FROGGY

Them the keys?

INJUN BILL

Looks like it.

FROGGY

All right then.

(They both dive for them, but neither can quite reach)

FROGGY

C'mere you rat bastards.... *(Manages to grab them)*
Yes! Oh sweet merciful Jesus yes!!

(He frees himself. He then runs straight out the door. INJUN BILL just watches him, expression-

less. FROGGY returns)

FROGGY

Say you're sorry.

INJUN BILL

What?

FROGGY

Say you're sorry that you almost cut my feet off.

INJUN BILL

I didn't almost cut your feet off.

FROGGY

Just say it.

(INJUN BILL says nothing)

FROGGY

S-A-R-Y. Say it.

(INJUN BILL says nothing)

FROGGY

Som'bitch.

(FROGGY opens his cell. INJUN BILL just stands there)

FROGGY

I reckon we should leave before the Sheriff changes his mind.

INJUN BILL

I reckon.

(They run out of the jail. Lights fade)

SCENE 2

ACTOR 2

(singing)

THE OUTLAW CAVES HE HID IN
HELD HIS TREASURE AND HIS MEM'RIES
OF DEAD FRIENDS AND DEADER ENEMIES,
AND THE TALES HIS KNIVES WOULD TELL
AND HE THOUGHT OF OLD GEORGE PARROT
'TIL HIS HEART JUST WOULDN'T BEAR IT
'CAUSE HE KNEW THEY'D NEVER MEET AGAIN,
'CEPT AT THE GATES OF HELL

*(A cave in Rattlesnake Butte, North Dakota.
FROGGY inspects it while INJUN BILL goes
through some supplies)*

FROGGY

Good lord, I coulda had a compass, two hounds,
and a map tattooed to my hand, I still wouldn't
have found this cave.

INJUN BILL

I been here before.

FROGGY

This a hide-out?

INJUN BILL

It is.

FROGGY

That make you some kinda outlaw, then?

INJUN BILL

It does.

FROGGY

No shit?

INJUN BILL

No shit.

FROGGY

What's your name?

(INJUN BILL says nothing, inspecting a belt full of knives)

FROGGY

We been on the road two hours now. Reckon I should know your name.

(INJUN BILL finds a military saber, examines it)

FROGGY

They call me Froggy.

INJUN BILL

That's fine.

FROGGY

On account of my Christian name.

INJUN BILL

Mm-hmm.

FROGGY

Jean-Phillipe DeLaRoux Baptiste.

(Beat)

INJUN BILL

I get it.

FROGGY

Born in Baton Rouge. Formerly of the 7th Cavalry, under General Custer hisself.

INJUN BILL

Mm-hmmm.

FROGGY

So... what do they call you, fella?

(Beat)

INJUN BILL

Bill.

FROGGY

Bill?

INJUN BILL

Bill.

FROGGY

That don't sound like no outlaw name.

INJUN BILL

That's not my concern.

FROGGY

You should be somethin' like "Bloody Bill" or "Bill the... Bloody" or somethin' like that.

INJUN BILL

Don't care what I should be.

FROGGY

Jesus, you a tight-lipped som'bitch. You got a last name, Unimpressive Bill?

(Beat. His last name is pronounced PEE-coat)

INJUN BILL

Picote.

FROGGY

(That sinks in) Smack my ass! You're Injun Bill Picote?!

INJUN BILL

Bill.

FROGGY

All this time, I've been talking to Injun Bill Picote?

INJUN BILL

I reckon.

FROGGY

Smack my ass!

INJUN BILL

No.

FROGGY

I heard you was in jail.

INJUN BILL

I was. With you.

FROGGY

No, no. I mean... didn't they catch you in Montana or somethin'?

INJUN BILL

Caught the gang I rode with. Didn't catch me. At

least, not then.

FROGGY

Goddamn, son. You're famous.

INJUN BILL

I am?

FROGGY

Well, with some folks. I heard you was the deadliest man alive with a knife.

INJUN BILL

There's probably deadlier.

FROGGY

Heard you put a man's eye out at a hundred paces for calling your mama a bean-eater.

INJUN BILL

My mother was Lakota.

FROGGY

I figured it was something like that. What with you bein' Injun Bill and all. *(Beat)* Wait. You say "Lakota?"

INJUN BILL

Mm-hmm.

(Beat)

FROGGY

What you need to understand is... I was just Custer's cook, alright? I never went on no battle field, and I never killed me no injun. Redskin. Lakota.

INJUN BILL

Fine.

FROGGY

So don't cut off my scalp or...

INJUN BILL

I ain't gonna kill you.

FROGGY

You sure about that?

INJUN BILL

You ain't wearin' the right shoes.

FROGGY

So I gotta ask. What's your hitch when it comes to a man's shoes?

INJUN BILL

Lemme ask you somethin'. Why are you still here?

FROGGY

Huh?

INJUN BILL

We busted out two hours back. Why ain't you shoved off?

FROGGY

Oh. I just... um... do you want me to go?

INJUN BILL

Yep.

FROGGY

Oh. OK. I understand.

INJUN BILL

Good.

FROGGY

You don't want me around.

INJUN BILL

Yep.

FROGGY

Fine! I don't need to follow around no half-injun foot-cutter!

INJUN BILL

Good. Go back to Louisiana.

FROGGY

Like this? Nossir. I gotta make my way. Then I'll send for my mamma and my sister.

INJUN BILL

You about as far from makin' your way as one man can get.

FROGGY

Do not mistake my current... sloppiness... for being a bum. I ain't a bum.

(INJUN BILL starts packing up)

FROGGY

Look. When I got kicked out of the army, I... fell on hard times. I'm a big enough man to admit it.

INJUN BILL

Yes you are.

FROGGY

And so I... hey! Was you callin' me fat again?

INJUN BILL

Just go on.

FROGGY

No! I wanna know if you was...

INJUN BILL
GO ON!

FROGGY

So alls I need is some direction. I'm a hell of a cook. Best you ever seen. I'm gonna head to Billings, and set me up a restaurant. Then, I send for my kin. Ain't seen 'em in ten years. *(He pulls a photo out of his pocket)* See there? That's my momma. And that little darlin' is my sister Annabelle. Well, ain't so little now, I guess. Be eighteen if I got my numbers right.

(INJUN BILL starts to leave)

FROGGY

Where you goin'?

INJUN BILL

I gotta see a man about some shoes.

FROGGY

Right. But where's that?

INJUN BILL

It don't matter.

FROGGY

If it don't matter, then tell me.

INJUN BILL

Fuck off, fat man! I don't gotta tell you nothin'!

FROGGY

Oh! I'm sorry! I figured what with me bein' responsible for bustin' you outta jail, you might treat me with certain... hospitalitude!

(Beat)

INJUN BILL
Goddammit. I'm going to Billings.

FROGGY
Billings? Billings, Montana?

INJUN BILL
Yeah.

FROGGY
Smack my ass! That's where I'm goin'.

INJUN BILL
I caught that.

FROGGY
Let me go with you.

INJUN BILL
No.

FROGGY
Please?

INJUN BILL
You just slow me down.

FROGGY
I won't bother you. Hand to god.

INJUN BILL
No.

FROGGY
I'll cook for you! Gimme the right spices, and I can make a buzzard taste like sirloin steak.

INJUN BILL
No.

FROGGY
I'll play my harmonica.

(That makes INJUN BILL stop)

FROGGY

Yessir. Whenever you want. I know lots of songs, too. Clementine and Dog Spit Blues and...

INJUN BILL

You know Let the Circle Be Unbroken?

FROGGY

Yes. Yes I do.

INJUN BILL

I like that one. Makes me feel...something.

FROGGY

So I can come with ya?

INJUN BILL

'Til I get sick of ya.

FROGGY

(shaking BILL's hand roughly) Thank you, Mr. Injun Bill. You will not regret it.

INJUN BILL

I gotta make one thing clear. We ain't friends. You get me?

FROGGY

I get you.

INJUN BILL

You can follow me. You can play the mouth harp. But we ain't friends.

FROGGY

I can live with that.

INJUN BILL

All right then.

(FROGGY looks at INJUN BILL)

FROGGY

Wait. You forgot your... I'll get it.

(FROGGY goes through the supplies)

FROGGY

Where the hell's your gun?

INJUN BILL

I ain't got one.

FROGGY

You ain't got a gun?

INJUN BILL

No.

FROGGY

What the hell kind of outlaw gots no gun?

INJUN BILL

I don't use guns. Not anymore.

FROGGY

What? Guns are great! They take all the diffi...
dificult... trouble out of killin' a man.

INJUN BILL

That's why I don't like 'em. You kill a man with
a gun... don't take no more skill than pointing a
finger. But a knife...

(INJUN BILL closes on FROGGY)

INJUN BILL

With a knife, you gotta get in close. You gotta
know how to fight, gotta be quick. That's how a
man fights. How a man kills. You get me?

FROGGY

I feel I gotta be honest with you. I'm one scary sentence away from pissing myself. I bring this up on account of I got no other pants.

(Beat. INJUN BILL slaps FROGGY on the shoulder and laughs)

INJUN BILL

Come on. We're killin' daylight.

FROGGY

Where we goin'?

INJUN BILL

Like any good sinner, we're headin' South.

(INJUN BILL leaves. FROGGY quickly checks the front of his pants)

FROGGY

Goddamn, that was a close one.

(He runs after INJUN BILL. Lights change)

SCENE 3

ACTOR 1

(singing)

SO BILL HEADED TO MONTANA
WITH A PARTNER THAT PLAIN CALLED HIM
FROGGY WAS THE NAME THEY CALLED HIM
WHEN THEY GOT THE CHANCE TO SPEAK
BUT THE CITY THAT THEY CAME TO
LOOKED LIKE GOD HAD SET A FLAME TO
NONE LEFT THERE BUT COLD DEAD CORPSES
'ROUND A CHAPEL, BURNED AND BLEAK

(An abandoned church in Northern Montana. Night. The place looks ransacked. FROGGY pokes his head through the door. He has a broken chair leg for a club. He looks around, leaping between pews. Satisfied, he goes back to the door)

FROGGY

What the hell happened to this town?

INJUN BILL

Goddamn blood bath.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Joseph Zettelmaier is a Michigan-based playwright and four-time nominee for the Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association Award for best new play, first in 2006 for *ALL CHILDISH THINGS*, then in 2007 for *LANGUAGE LESSONS*, in 2010 for *IT CAME FROM MARS* and in 2012 for *DEAD MAN'S SHOES*. Other plays include *SALVAGE*, *THE GRAVEDIGGER - A FRANKENSTEIN PLAY*, *NORTHERN AGGRESSION*, *DR. SEWARD'S DRACULA*, *INVASIVE SPECIES*, *THE SCULLERY MAID*, *NIGHT BLOOMING*, and *EBENEZER*.

POINT OF ORIGIN won Best Locally Created Script 2002 from the Ann Arbor News, and *THE STILLNESS BETWEEN BREATHS* also won Best New Play 2005 from the Oakland Press. *THE STILLNESS BETWEEN BREATHS* and *IT*

CAME FROM MARS were selected to appear in the National New Play Network's Festival of New Plays. He also co-authored Flyover, USA: Voices From Men of the Midwest at the Williamston Theatre (Winner of the 2009 Thespie Award for Best New Script). He also adapted CHRISTMAS CAROL'D for the Performance Network.

IT CAME FROM MARS was a recipient of 2009's Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award, and won Best New Script 2010 from the Lansing State Journal. His play DEAD MAN'S SHOES won the Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award in 2011.

Joseph is an Associate Artist at First Folio Shakespeare, an Artistic Ambassador to the National New Play Network, and an adjunct lecturer at Eastern Michigan University, where he teaches Dramatic Composition.

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