

Wild Pecos Bill

Wild Tales of a Wild Texan

By R. Eugene Jackson

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STORY OF PLAY

It's the rootin'-tootin', ropin' and shootin' Wild, Wild West, and Pecos Bill learns how to be a low-down dirty cowpoke. But when he sees Sweet Sue ridin' her buckin' catfish, he falls head over spurs for her and even takes an hour or so to dig a ditch (*which he later calls the Pecos River.*) from north Texas to the Rio Grande so that her catfish can have a decent stream for swimming.

Determined to win her as his furever sweetheart, Bill follows her dusty trail. First, though, he rids the town of Pecos of all its outlaws, tames some purty wild desert creatures, and rescues his Sweet Sue from a couple of mean hombres called Buck and Chuck.

The play is written in Story Theatre style so that little or no scenery is required and characters may double roles no matter the gender. Percussion instruments and a "geetar" may accompany the action.

TIME: The late 1800s.

PLACE: There is one acting space which represents several locales at different times with the addition of small scenic pieces, such as a cactus or a campfire.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Five to eighteen actor/actresses play the following parts:)

Percussionist
Folk Singer *(If desired.)*
Narrator
Wild Pecos Bill
His Ma
His Pa
Coyotes
Cowpoke
Sweet Sue *(Slue-Foot Sue in the original.)*
Bowlegged Bob
Tex Mex
Tom
The Old Timer
Cougar
Chuck
Buck
Gabriel
St. Peter

*With the exception of the character of Wild Pecos Bill, all roles may be doubled and, in the style of Story Theatre, any role may be played by either a male or female.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

(Although there are no breaks in the stage action, the general scenes are as follows:)

SCENE 1 - How Pecos Was Raised by Coyotes

SCENE 2 - How Pecos Learned He Was a Man

SCENE 3 - How Pecos Fell in Love

SCENE 4 - How Pecos Cleaned Up the Town of Pecos

SCENE 5 - How Pecos Tamed the Wild Creatures

SCENE 6 - How Pecos Rescued Sweet Sue

PRODUCTION NOTES

All the scenes may be played before a single, neutral, Western setting, while the actors are dressed in sneakers, jeans, and Western shirts to which small prop pieces are added to help suggest each character. More elaborate scenery and costumes are possible at the discretion of the director. At the side and visible to the audience are several percussion instruments, such as cymbals, a bass drum, castanets, woodblocks, a slide whistle, etc., that are used to give background sounds or to accent stage actions. These sounds are made when indicated in the script, or at any other appropriate place as determined by the director. A folksinger with a guitar may provide additional background music or musical interludes between the stories. The actors play the roles of cowboys and wild animals—chasing, racing and bucking. They cheer, scream and yell. Percussion provides miscellaneous sounds to accompany the rodeo.

See end of play for list of props.

WILD PECOS BILL

(AT RISE: The ACTORS enter dressed as cowboys. They play the roles of cowboys and wild animals—chasing, racing, and bucking. They cheer, scream and yell. The NARRATOR steps forward to quiet everyone.)

NARRATOR: All right, cowpokes. The rodeo's over. Time to hang up your spurs and bridles. Settle down those broncos now. Settle down. *(NO ONE pays any attention to HIM.)* I said, tie those horses up and button up your lips. *(THEY don't listen. HE pulls his obviously fake pistol.)* If I don't get silence in two seconds, I'm going to put a hole through something important. *(THEY are still yelling.)* One second. Two seconds. You had your warning.

(HE fires toward ACTOR ONE. PERCUSSIONIST: Rim shot makes the sound. The actor's hat flies off. [NOTE: A string tied to his hat is pulled by a person standing behind him.] ALL are suddenly silent and stare at the NARRATOR.)

NARRATOR: *(Cont.)* That's better. I want all you cowpokes to gather around because I have a few lies to tell.

ACTOR TWO: Lies? We don't want to hear any lies.

NARRATOR: *(Points HIS pistol at ACTOR TWO.)* And I say you do.

ACTOR TWO: We do, we do.

NARRATOR: Anyway, these stories are about that famous West Texas boy, Wild Pecos Bill—and all stories about him are lies.

ACTOR THREE: But why do we want to hear lies?

NARRATOR: To learn about the wild, Wild West. Even if what you learn isn't true.

(The ACTORS boo HIM/HER. PERCUSSIONIST responds.)

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NARRATOR: *(Cont.)* All right, all right. You're right, of course. Why learn it if it isn't true?

ACTORS: *(Ad-lib.)* Why? Why?

NARRATOR: If you'll hush up, I'll tell you why. *(PERCUSSIONIST cymbal crash.)* A long time ago in West Texas, cowboys sat around campfires after dinner and sang songs to the music of a guitar or harmonica and told stories to each other. Many of the stories were tall tales—lies, in fact. Why did they do it? To pass the time, to socialize, to amuse themselves, to see who could tell the biggest whopper. And tales about Wild Pecos Bill contain some of the biggest whoppers of all time.

ACTORS: *(Ad-lib.)* Well, tell us. Tell us a story about Wild Pecos Bill. We want to hear a story. Let's hear it. *(In unison.)* Tell us some lies!

(PERCUSSIONIST accent.)

NARRATOR: I thought you'd never ask. But I'll need your help. Each of you can be a character in my story. Pick out a costume piece that fits your part—and let's get started.

(The ACTORS rush to a box or a rack of costumes and pick out costume pieces appropriate to their characters as the NARRATOR describes the scene.)

NARRATOR: *(Cont.)* The place is the barren plains of central Texas. The only thing in sight: one dried-up old cactus, *(HE places the cactus on stage.)* and a run-down shack.

ACTOR ONE: I don't see a run-down shack.

NARRATOR: *(Making it up on the spot.)* Uh, well, it's so run down it's dropped out of sight.

ACTORS: *(Ad-lib, unbelievable.)* Noooo! Come on! Tell us!

(PERCUSSIONIST sound.)

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NARRATOR: *(Irritated.)* All right. Pretend it's offstage. Over there. *(S/HE points off.)*

ACTORS: *(Ad-lib.)* That's better. Okay. That I can believe. That makes sense. Offstage.

NARRATOR: The time is the late 1800s. Wild Bill has just been born, and his ma brings him into the front yard of their ... worn-down old shack. *(Added quickly.)* That's over there offstage. *(The NARRATOR may play one of the parts or remain as the Narrator throughout.)* This is the story of "How Wild Bill Pecos Was Raised by the Coyotes."

(MA walks a crawling PECOS with a bib, from the shack to the yard. Pecos has a cowbell around his neck that clangs noisily as he waddles. Carrying a large pail or sack, Ma places Pecos in the middle of the yard.)

MA: Thar you be, little Billy. You jist sit right hyer and have a good time while yore old ma sweeps the dirt floor in the shanty. Hyer's you some playin' thangs. *(SHE hands HIM a rubber snake from the sack.)* Now, don't you go and hurt this old rattler, little Billy. An' don't bite it 'cause you might poison it.

PECOS: *(HE twirls it as if it were a rope.)* Goo-goo, Ma-ma. Yahooooooo! *(After playing with it in a variety of ways, and giggling as HE does so, he finally tosses it offstage.)*

(PERCUSSIONIST slide whistle and drum hit at the end.)

MA: *(SHE shades her eyes and looks off where HE threw it.)* You got good aim thar, little Billy. You hit that pesky old prairie dog right up side the head. *(Pause.)* And now hyer's you somethin' to pick yore teeth with. *(SHE gives HIM a huge fake Bowie knife from her sack.)*

PECOS: *(Picks HIS teeth.)* Ga-ga, Ma-ma. Ga-ga. *(HE pulls a rock out of his mouth as if he has picked it from his teeth, looks at it, and tosses it offstage.)*

(PERCUSSIONIST slide whistle and drum hit at the end.)

End of Freeview

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