

MAT brings Robin Hood to stage for Christmas

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By Paul Dragu



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Brandon Matte and Martin Holt rehearse a scene from MAT Robin Hood panto production.

Montana Actors' Theatre is continuing its annual holiday tradition of putting on silly, interactive panto plays, this year with "Robin Hood."

"It's just ridiculous fun," MAT Artistic Director Jay Pyette said Wednesday. "You got Martin Holt in a dress. What else do you need?"

A modern panto, or pantomime, considered a British creation, takes a well-known story, often a fable or children's story, and puts it on the stage with dancing, singing, jokes and other twists on the original story. The staging of pantos is a Christmas tradition in England. Last year, MAT put on a "Hansel and Gretel" panto.

Casey Pratt is directing "Robin Hood." With hundreds of "Robin Hood" pantos out there, MAT decided to go with Scot Todd's "Robin hood and the Knights of the Flatpack Table," he said.

There are disadvantages and advantages to pantos, Pratt said.

"The fun part is it's a lot more free. You're allowed to experiment more. A lot of our over-acting is encouraged," he said.

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Caroline Tuss rehearses a scene from the MAT Robin Hood panto production.

The challenge with pantos, Pratt said, is they require audience participation, which makes rehearsing difficult.

"The actors gotta do a lot of improv because there's no script for the audience," Pratt said.

Pantos are fun for the audience, Pratt said, and "Robin Hood" will be no exception. The number of young kids in the play will compound the fun, he added.

With "Robin Hood," MAT will be breaking two of the cardinal rules of acting - never perform with children or animals. Since there will be children performing as woodland creatures, Pratt said, both rules will be broken with "Robin Hood."

Show times start Friday at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and on Dec. 21-23 with matinees at 2 p.m. Dec. 10 and 17. Doors and backstage lounge open a half-hour before show times.

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