Theatre Royal Plymouth

Calamity Jane

Audio described performance Sat July 19th   2015 @ 2.30p.m.

 Preceded by a Touch Tour@ 1.30p.m.

Welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth and this Jamie Wilson production produced by Warner Brothers, of the musical Calamity Jane, adapted for the stage by Charles K Freeman and the music was written by Sammy Fain and lyrics by Paul Francis Webster. The musical combo directed by Christopher Mundy from the screens at the rear of the auditorium, is visible on the stage throughout the show and they all become various background characters in the 9 scenes of this Act. The musicians include 2  cellists, 2 trumpeters, a flautist, 2 clarinet players,   2 saxophonists,   two  guitar players, two banjo players,  two violinists and a piano player.The men are dressed in wild west style  costumes of   shirts, waistcoat, trousers and stetsons and   the ladies are in nipped waist  full skirted long dresses over  full petticoats  or belted  skirts and full sleeved  blouses under waistcoats  and wearing ankle boots .There will be 10 songs, two of which will be a reprise.

My name is Pauline, and I will describe Act 1 which runs for 60 minutes and my colleague, Wendy will describe Act 2 and will commence her programme notes 6 minutes before curtaining up.

This show originally premiered in the Watermill Theatre in West Berkshire in 2014 then this    UK tour   began at the Aylesbury Waterside Theatre on the 14th of January of this year.

The show will run for 2 hours including a 20-minute interval.

**There will be gun fire, flashing lights, loud music, fighting and semi nudity.**

The story concerns a woman, Calamity Jane, who prefers buckskin clothes to petticoats and who rides shotgun for the Deadwood stagecoach and is secretly in love with Danny Gilmartin, a Lieutenant in the Union Army. (The civil war ran from 1861 to 1865.) She has a love hate relationship with Bill, a gambler and gunslinger, also known as Wild Bill Hickok.

 Historically, Bill’s   character’s original name was James Butler Hickock. He eventually made a living as a marksman in various travelling shows, but he is a folk hero of the American Old West as a soldier/spy, scout, lawman, cattle rustler, gunslinger, gambler, showman and actor as well as his involvement in many famous gunfights.  He was shot dead in 1876 while playing poker and his hand, two pairs, black aces and eights is known as a dead man’s hand.

The original Calamity Jane was born Martha Jane Canary, and she was an American Frontiers woman, sharpshooter, sex worker and storyteller. She was orphaned at 12 and had to care for her 5 siblings. She gained notoriety for her lifestyle and association with other figures, including Wild Bill Hickock. She became a celebrated figure, known for her defiance of gender norms and her compassion for the sick and needy. She performed in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show as a sharpshooter, further solidifying her fame, and this made her a symbol of the Wild West known for her bravery, defiance and sometimes reckless behaviour. She died in 1903 at the age of 51.

It has been widely reported that Calam and Bill were romantically involved but there is little evidence, although it is claimed she loved Bill, but he did not return her affections.

The full theatrical curtain is gold with a broad red hem and there are also hessian sack drapes and ropes above and at the corners. Light filters across the curtain from the left   to highlight a banjo dangling from a rope on the right.  The proscenium is edged with a textured border and this changes colour in some of the scenes.

An older bushy bearded man with a battered straw hat on his head, ambles across the stage, wearing tattered faded denim dungarees over an old shirt. This is Rattlesnake. He unclips the banjo and tentatively playsa few chords of **The Black Hills of Dakota** as the curtain rises and it is Deadwood City Dakota. It is 1875 and we are in the Golden Garter, a combination depot, hotel, bar/saloon, gambling Hall and theatre, operated by Harry Miller with Joe as the bartender and Susan his niece helps out.

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Musicians are seated under the rope edged wooden balconies which are supported by rope entwined wooden pillars on either side of a small red curtained stage at the rear reached by a small set of steps on the left.  Ropes edge the balconies, stage and proscenium. Open stairs under the balconies lead to the first-floor walkways where the rails are festooned with half-moon draped flags bearing a blue and red disc on white. Oil lamps are fixed to the walls on the first-floor balcony and beneath.  Small barrels are dotted around, in amongst Windsor backed chairs and old cartwheels are propped against the pillars that support the balconies. A cartwheel fitment hangs above the saloon fitted with perforated tin cans around its rim and decorated with steer horns. More perforated tin cans are used as footlights.

After an irate encounter with Bill who is in a mid-length crombie style coat over a shirt and waistcoat with a shoestring tie and carrying pistols in a double holster, Calam sings Men**.**

**The Black Hills of Dakota** is played and sung followed by **The Deadwood Stage.**

 The buxom Calamity, aka as Calam, joins the crowd and she is in a pale buckskin fringed jacket, trousers tucked into knee high boots, and a military style western union cap is covering her long blonde pigtail. She carries two pearl handled pistols in her holsters. **Adelaid Adams** is sung as Miller is waiting for the actress to arrive on the stagecoach.

It is the same evening and the lamps are lit. A rowdy crowd greet Calamity and Danny, and she   treats them to a few choice tales of her exploits on the stagecoach. Susan waits on the tables dressed in a flowery dress and her hair is in a curly bun. **Careless with the truth** is sung to a lot of caterwauling from the men.

Miller is eagerly awaiting his star act, Francis Fryer who duly arrives dressed in a patterned waistcoat, beige frock coat and trousers and wearing a trilby style hat and carrying a small suitcase with his name printed on it.  He sings and dances to **Everyone Complains About the Weather.** Miller is disappointed, but   he agrees to some deception which works for a few minutes as Frances   spelt with an I, sings **A Hive full of Honey** to the crowd**.**

 It is the next morning and all is peaceful, Bill is playing Solitaire, Calam is restless, looking at a picture card of an actress called Adelaid Adams, whom she finally elects   to find and bring to Deadwood. She sings **I can do without you**, before she departs on the train to Chicago. This is emulated by chairs arranged in a line side on after they ‘gallop’ to the station.

   It is the Bijou Theatre in Chicago and Adelaid in her basque and stockings, is performing on the stage, singing **Tis Harry I’m planning to marry** accompanied by a young man to a large audience of mostly men. She finishes to loud applause as Calam tries to gain entry to the Theatre.

   Calam arrives in Adelaid’s dressing room. A small table and chair are on the left, a folding    screen central and a full-length mirror on the right with a clothes rail in the back. She just misses Adelaid and so the misunderstanding begins as Katie, her dresser, is trying on Adelaid’s hats and singing a reprise of Tis **Harry I’m planning to marry** She is in   a nipped waist dress with her hair pinned up.

   The Deadwood stagecoach is constructed from a tall step ladder for the driver, a piano for the shotgun rider, Calam, four chairs in pairs for the passengers and cartwheels resting beside them.  Parasols are spun at the back. The horse is a   musician knocking coconut shells against a barrel, attached to the step ladder with traces held by Rattlesnake. This is disassembled as it arrives at Deadwood and Katie enters the saloon carrying her suitcase labelled Adelaid Adams, followed by Calam and Katie is introduced to Miller, Bill and Danny.  Calam sings **Windy City.** All seems well but Fryer is suspicious.

   A nervous Katie is in the dressing room with a table and chair on the left and mirror on the right.  She is in a strapless sparkly basque with a short train of tulle, dark fishnet stockings, ankle boots and a fancy plumed hat. Fryer and Susan reveal to her that they know she is not Adelaid.

  Back in the Bar and Calam is entertaining the crowd with another of her stories and sings **Careless with the truth** until Katie makes her appearance on the stage and nervously sings Keep **it under your hat** before she admits she is not Adelaid. Mayhem ensues before Calam quietens the men and Katie is given a second chance.

   However, Calam does not get off so lightly  as Bill  is  furious at being fooled and having to dress as   a down market Queen Victoria  in a  hooped patchwork skirt and sacking top wearing a small crown as he lost the bet that she could bring Adelaid Adams to Deadwood. He   rounds on Calam and there is a scuffle before we leave them.

Cast

Calamity Jane……………………………………………Carrie Hope Fletcher

Susan……………………………………………………..Hollie Cassar

Katie Brown………………………………………………Serena Sandham Davies

Wild Bill Hickock…………………………………………..Vinny Coyle

Harry Miller………………………………………………..Peter Peverley

Danny Gilmartin………………………………………….Luke Wilson

Francis Fryer…………………………………………….Samuel Holmes

Adelaid Adams…………………………………………..Molly Grace Cutler

**Audio described performance 2:30pm Saturday 19th July 2025 Act 2 programme notes by W. Screech.**

Welcome back to the second half of the much loved, classic musical “Calamity Jane”. I’m Wendy and I shall describe Act 2 for you- it runs for approximately an hour.

**Act 2** is just as rumbustious as Act 1- there’s lots of hollering and arguing, as Calam and Bill continue to bicker and fight, several gunshots, plus plenty of singing and a full-blown Hoe Down party thrown in for good measure.

The main set remains the same throughout- with a few changes of backdrop on the inner stage and some simple suggestive decorations added to the balconies. The main floor of the stage is generally kept clear for the truly talented ensemble cast to play their many instruments, dance, sing and act- often all at the same time !

Different settings are cleverly suggested by the simple addition, removal or rearrangement of pieces of fabric, furniture and props as required- the poor battered upright piano being the most over-worked and abused ! The balconies are also used for the musicians to play from.

There are no new characters in Act 2 but we learn more about various tangled friendships, love affairs, heartaches, jealousies and their resolutions. The everyday 19th century Western style costumes remain the same except in the party scene at Fort Scully and for the finale when they become more elaborate and colourful for some of the characters.

At the end of **Act 1** we left a humiliated Calam roughly tied to a chair by an exasperated Bill after she had failed to bring the starlet Adelaid Adams to perform at the Golden Garter as promised. Katie Brown, Adelaid’s maid had owned up to her deception then bravely gone on to entertain and win over the affections of the Deadwood locals.

**Act 2 has 7 separate scenes** and opens on an empty stage- there is a seated musician gently picking out a tune on his guitar in the shadows on the left. We’re outside the Golden Garter as Calam appears carrying several leather suitcases, chatting with Katie who follows her with a round leather hat box. Bill and Lieutenant Danny Gilmartin both arrive separately and are sorry to see Katie leaving. Danny carries a hastily hidden bouquet of local wildflowers. Once alone Bill sings a touching solo of **“Higher than a hawk”** accompanying himself on his guitar.

**Scene 2** finds us outside Calam’s wooden cabin somewhere out in the wooded hills away from Deadwood City. A romantic, smudgily painted backdrop of gilded hills, a cabin and a few trees at dusk, appears on the inner stage suggesting this new venue. They step down and Calam introduces Katie to her new abode. Together they transform it into a cosy, feminine home by dusting, making a table out of two barrels and a large plank of wood, adding chairs and a sarsaparilla bottle for a vase. The table is covered with a patchwork cloth made from a variety of different sized squares and rectangles of pink and white patterned fabrics. They duet to **“A woman’s touch”,**  adding matching tied back, full-length patchwork curtains to the right and left balconies and Katie vigorously brushes the floor with a besom broom. Meanwhile. Calam changes into a pale floral blouse and cream , heavy skirt- a transformation indeed- no more buckskins- for now at least ! As if by magic, Katie also bakes a cake using a cupboard in the panelled back of the piano as an oven ! The two friends find they have visitors, who both vie for Katie’s attention and for her to partner them at the ball at Fort Scully. Calam leaves them to visit a sick neighbour- returning in a somewhat dishevelled state !

**Scene 3** is set at Fort Scully-it’s the night of the dance. The only change to the set is the removal of the cabin props and the semi-circular flags on the balconies –they are replaced by pink gingham swags looped with pale pink and white flowers. There is a painted backdrop on the inner stage depicting the mountains and hills of the moonlit surrounding area. The ensemble cast are all dressed up for a party– the sepia toned everyday clothes are replaced by smart frocks and jackets and ties. The women are in full-length silk or satin pastel blue, green and cream gowns, with bustles and either off-the-shoulder boned bodices or with short puffed sleeves and elbow length gloves. There is a subtle sparkle in the fabrics and beads used- the women’s hair is elegantly coiled and coiffed and everyone is on their best behaviour. Katie is resplendent in a sophisticated, gauzy pale blue gown.

Some of the men are in dress uniform-blue tunics with gold buttons, paler blue trousers with a red side stripe and a red, deep cummerbund with a side sash. The other local men sport a smart frock coat, dark trousers, boots plus a waistcoat, shirt and Western-style silk ribbon bow tie. Bill is immaculately turned out with a muted gold, double-breasted waistcoat and matching tie- he looks particularly dashing and handsome. He is stunned by Calam’s transformation- her party outfit of a dark peach satin frock with a draped apron skirt, beautiful auburn chignon, long white gloves and silver dancing shoes is initially hidden by an old navy blue Army greatcoat. Calam is a sensation and really enjoys the energetic Hoe Down that follows. However, the night descends into drama and chaos with accusations, the odd gunshot, recriminations and a lot of crying, shouting and some angry disrobing !

**Scene 4** finds us inside the Golden Garter, a few days later. Susan and Fryer are ending their **“Weather”** routine with umbrellas and yellow sou’westers. Katie reprises her **“Harry”** number dressed in her feathered hat, sparkly black basque and stockings as Calam, back in usual buckskins, bursts in and makes a scene. Bill steps in, there is more shooting and Calam is humiliated. An honest, emotional conversation with Bill takes a sudden and unexpected turn leaving us with Calam’s beautiful solo rendition of **“My secret love”** and a whole new outlook for her.

**Scene 5** finds us outside the Golden Garter the next morning. Calam is in high spirits but is given the cold shoulder by everyone she meets. Danny has a letter from Katie and suddenly Calam has a new mission.

**Scene 6** sees Calamattempting to stop the Deadwood stage and to return it and one particular passenger, to town. The stagecoach is again ingeniously conjured up from the all- suffering piano plus step ladder and chairs as before, but facing us this time with Rattlesnake holding the reins. Calam is successful in her mission this time and we return to the Golden Garter for a triple happy occasion !!! We end Act 2 with much dancing and a joyous reprise of **“The black hills of Dakota”** and **“The Deadwood stage”.**

We hope you really enjoyed this afternoon’s performance and that you have a safe journey home.

The next audio described show is **Matthew Bourne’s new dance drama “The Midnight Bell”** here in the Lyric on Saturday 26th July at 2:30pm. There will be a Touch Tour before the show at 1pm. Further information regarding any Access performances can be found in the theatre’s regular brochures, on the website or at the Box Office ( just phone 01752 267222 or call in, in person.)

Thank you for your company – and good bye/good night for now. We hope to meet you again.