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# 'The Second Shepherd's Christmas' this weekend

## Charlotte Burrous

The Daily Record

Back in the Old West, cattlemen were prejudiced against sheep.

So when the local preacher approaches Cole, Natalie and Gibson to guard a lamb for the upcoming Christmas pageant, they are reluctant to go against their peers, but they agree to do it — for the minister.

However, before long, the village swindler manages to switch his goods for a box with the lamb in it.

That's when the world gets turned upside down in the August Mergelman's adaptation of "The Second Shepherd's Christmas."

Actors and actresses will present a dramatic reading of the play at 7 p.m. Dec. Friday and Saturday, and at 2 p.m. Sunday in the Annex at 507 1/2 Main St.

The original play is called "The Second Shepherd's Play" because there was an earlier play about the shepherds.

"It's not about the second shepherd," Mergelman said. "It's the second play about the shepherds."

Based on a play written in England in the medieval period, it "is one of many Biblical episodes," Mergelman said. "Each Biblical episode was its own play. These would have been performed in the English town of Wakefield in the Middle Ages. I saw a lot of

potential in it."

The story revolves around the Basque family, who live on the Kezar Ranch.

"My family settled in Gunnison in the late 1800s," Mergelman said. "I actually go back five generations there, so this play is set in the Gunnison country."

At the time, the Cattlemen's Association wanted to keep sheep out of Gunnison. During this era, numerous sheep were slaughtered by burning them in barns or running them off cliffs.

"This was happening

around World War I," Mergelman said.

The idea of adapting the play began when he studied it in college. Over the years, he has thought about it on and off since then. Finally, the time was right and he adapted it, adding a cowboy twist.

"I did the original play with the Splash kids program," Mergelman said. "We couldn't do the original because that is in the language of Chaucer."

Starring in the play are Kyle McDowell as Cole, Ray Ellis as Gibson, Jennifer Barnes-Gatzke as

Natalie, Steven Minich as Mack, Brenna Angelo-Surber as Myrna and Ashley Hirt as Frankie, as well as several others.

Along with the play, the Sage Hens, featuring Kate Colby and Elaine Schuhrke, will present a variety of comedy, singing, strumming and joke slinging.

Tickets are \$7 at the door or \$5 with a can or box of food for donation. Doors open a half hour before curtain open.


Charlotte Burrous can be reached at [cburrous@cc-dailyrecord.com](mailto:cburrous@cc-dailyrecord.com)

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