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**WESTERN SUCCESS** - Local playwright August Mergelman has achieved success by adapting classic stories to plays with Western Themes. The poster at right, designed by his sister Audrie Mergelman, promotes "Ramona & Joel," his Western version of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." His works have won several awards. (Courtesy photos)



## Local playwright finds success with Western-themed works

**By Diana Armstrong**  
Citizen staff writer

Local playwright August Mergelman presented one of his award-winning classic story adaptations to his hometown at The Events Center Annex in Canon City, Dec. 11-13.

Mergelman, who has adapted six classic stories into western-style plays, presented a dramatic reading of "The Second Shepherd's Christmas," a cowboy adaptation of "The Second Shepherds' Play."

Mergelman said the owner of the event center, Janie Coyne, is interested in theatre, and they worked together to draw in local singing and acting talent including Florence residents Emily Long, Joel Hamilton, and Kate Colby.

He said "The Second Shepherds' Play" probably was the first English Christmas play ever written. He changed the play to take place in Gunnison, which is where his dad, Florence resident and business owner Rudl Mergelman, is from.

The playwright is also the son of Carol Blackburn of Canon City.

"It's a silly skit... a

farce that ends with the Nativity," he said. "I took stories from our family history for Second Shepherds'," he said.

Between the play's four scenes, The Sage Hens consisting of Kate Colby and Elaine Schuhrke, performed songs they had chosen for the production. He said they added new lyrics to songs they had chosen that added a lot of fun to the performance.

Mergelman's first adaptation, "A Midsummer Night's Western," from William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," has been published by Pioneer Drama Service. It won the Third Playwright's Showcase of the Western Region of 2007, which won him a full production at Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Denver.

"It is an honor for the playwrights to be able to watch and critique their plays at Red Rocks," he said.

"Ramona and Joel," a wild-west comedy adaptation of William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," has been published by Heuer Publishing and won the Rocky Mountain Theater Association

Playwrighting Contest of 2009. The play is set in Victor and Florence.

"The Second Shepherd's Christmas" won the Fourth Playwright's Showcase of the Western Region of 2009.

His other adaptations include "Isabella and the Duke," a farcical adaptation of "Measure for Measure," and "Solar Tempest," a science-fiction adaptation of "The Tempest."

Mergelman currently is working on a holiday play in prose called "On the Twelfth Night of Christmas." He said all of the 12 gifts of the folk song are exchanged in the course of the play.

Mergelman grew up in Canon City, and while attending Canon City High School he performed in the theatre group. He also performed for the Fremont Civic Theater and the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

He received his degree in communications and theater at Western State College and now teaches English for The Goal Academy, an online high school.