

The Tall Tale Too Tangled to Be Told

By Bill West & Gail H. Johnsen

SETTING: 1890's Western Frontier Saloon. Piano playing the good-time-saloon-type music that is played in every western movie.

SCENE ONE: Curtain opens with people sitting at the bar and gamblers sitting around tables. Western music continues and there are several gunfighters who are doing gun tricks to the music and this continues for a minute.

DIRECTOR: (COMING DOWN FROM THE STAGE WITH A CLIP BOARD IN HIS HANDS) Ok everybody, take your places and let's get this rehearsal going! (GUNFIGHTERS SITUATE THEMSELVES AROUND THE ROOM. DIRECTOR POSITIONS HIMSELF IN THE AUDIENCE.) Action!

DANCERS: (COME OUT AND START A DANCE NUMBER WITH MUSIC FROM THAT TIME PERIOD.)

STRANGER: (WALKS IN AND YELLS AT PECOS BILL WHO IS SITTING AT THE BAR. MUSIC IS SUPPOSED TO STOP AND THE SALOON IS HUSHED, BUT WE HAVE TROUBLE GETTING THIS RIGHT.)

(STRANGER MENACING MANNER; TRYING TO YELL OVER THE MUSIC AND THE NOISE.)
Hey Bill! Pecos Bill! They say you're pretty fast!

DIRECTOR: (YELLING AND COMING UP FROM HIS SEAT IN FRONT.) Cut! (MUSIC AND NOISE STOPS; DIRECTOR ADDRESSES PIANO PLAYER.) Why are we still hearing the music after the stranger yells, "Hey Bill!"?

PIANO PLAYER: Well, if I stop playing right away then I'm only playing for a few seconds.

DIRECTOR: If you don't stop, nobody can hear the actors!

PIANO PLAYER: Well, I was kind of hoping for a bigger part in the play.

DIRECTOR: Look! We need to have the music stop when the stranger yells, okay??

PIANO PLAYER: But I'm a good piano player!

DIRECTOR: This is not a show about a piano player! So just do it the way the script is written! OK people, let's take it from the top.

(EVERYONE RESETS, MUSIC STARTS AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME IT'S A SLOW BEAUTIFUL MELODY.)

DIRECTOR: Cut! (ADDRESSING THE PIANO PLAYER AGAIN.) What are you playing?

PIANO PLAYER: Well, if I can only play for a few seconds, I'd like to play something that displays my talent a little better.

DIRECTOR: This is a saloon! Saloons have saloon music!

PIANO PLAYER: Then I quit! I won't play anything. (GETS UP AND STARTS WALKING OFF.)

DIRECTOR: (TO ASSISTANT DIRECTOR) Do we have anyone to replace her?

ASSISTANT; No, we don't.

DIRECTOR: (CHASING AFTER THE PIANO PLAYER) Alright! Come back. Play whatever you want, just stop when the stranger yells.

(EVERYONE RESETS, MUSIC STARTS AGAIN, A SLOW BEAUTIFUL MUSIC. THE STRANGER ENTERS BUT DOESN'T YELL, BUT BEGINS TO SING THE MELODY OF THE SONG.)

DIRECTOR: Cut! (ADDRESSING THE STRANGER) What are you doing?

STRANGER: I just love that music! I just wanted to sing a little before I yelled.

DIRECTOR: You're a gunslinger, not a music appreciation student! You walk in and yell! Now from the top!

(EVERYONE RESETS, BEAUTIFUL MUSIC AGAIN, STRANGER WALKS IN AND YELLS. THE MUSIC STOPS.)

STARNGER: Hey Bill! They say you're pretty fast!

P. Bill: (TURNS TO THE STRANGER.) Fast at what?

DIRECTOR: Cut! Where does the script say, "Fast at what? Show me!

P.BILL: Well, I just thought I should make sure everybody knows before I answer.

DIRECTOR: You're both gunslingers. He's not tracking you down to challenge you to a footrace! Now let's do it right! (DROPS CLIPBOARD DOWN ON THE FLOOR IN FRUSTRATION, MAKING A LOUD SOUND WHICH THE GIRL BACKSTAGE MISTAKES FOR A GUNSHOT AND SHE RUNS ONSTAGE.)

GIRL: (RUNNING OUT TO THE KID, CRYING AND FRANTIC) You killed him! You shot my love!

DIRECTOR: That wasn't the gunshot, sweetheart. You're early.

GIRL: Oh, sorry... (SHE WALKS BACK OFFSTAGE.)

DIRECTOR: Alright! Let's go again from the top!

(EVERYONE RESETS; GROUP OF COWBOYS COME IN ON THE FLOOR NEAR THE AUDIENCE AND THEY ARE DOING ROPE TRICKS TO THE MUSIC.)

DIRECTOR: Cut! Cut! Cut!

COWBOY #1: What the matter with him? (SAID WITH A DRAWL)

COWBOY #2: Sounds like he wants to cut something.

DIRECTOR: What do you think you're doing?

COWBOY #3: Why we're practicing our rope tricks for our show.

DIRECTOR; What ward are you in anyway?

COWBOY #4: Why, we're in the mental ward! Hahaha! (ALL THE COWBOYS LAUGH.)

DIRECTOR: Well, they're practicing in the other room. This is our time for the stage now. So why don't you just mosey on out of here!

COWBOY #5: Sure partner. (THEY EXIT WHILE DOING ROPE TRICKS)

DIRECTOR: Now cut that out!

COWBOY #6: There he goes again with that stuff about cutting.

DIRECTOR: (TO ASSISTANT) Would you go look around and see if any directors are missing a bunch of rowdy ropers?

ASSISTANT: (WITH A DRAWL) No problem, partner.

DIRECTOR: Ok, ready on the set!

STRANGER: Hey, Bill! They say you're pretty fast!

P. BILL: (TURNING TO THE STRANGER) Yeah! You could say that.

STRANGER: Well, I've seen you draw and I don't think you're as fast as I am.

(CROWD STARTS MOVING AWAY FROM THE GUNSLINGERS AND TOWARD THE EDGES.)

P. BILL: Ok then, but you won't be the first man to say that right before he dies! (SILENCE FILLS THE ROOM AND THE GUNSLINGERS LOOK FOREBODINGLY AT EACH OTHER.)

GIRL #2: (CUTS ACROSS THE STAGE BETWEEN THE GUNFIGHTERS.)

DIRECTOR: Cut! (ADDRESSING THE GIRL.) You know, generally speaking, I don't think that people walk between two men who are about to kill each other.

GIRL #2: Oh! I'm really sorry, but I refuse to stand by him anymore. He stood me up on Saturday night.

BOY: I told you, it wasn't my fault. (ADDRESSING THE DIRECTOR) It's not my fault. My parents got me home late from the program and I couldn't call. Is it my fault my little sisters wants to be a ballerina? (HE CROSSES OVER TO WHERE THE GIRL IS. SHE TURNS HER BACK ON HIM.)

DIRECTOR: (TO THE ASSISTANT) Do we have anyone who handles dating disputes?

ASSISTANT: I don't know. I guess we could call _____. We call them for everything else.

DIRECTOR: Fine, fine. Places everybody! (EVERYONE RESETS)

P. BILL: Well, you won't be the first man to say that right before he dies.

STRANGER: You want to settle this outside, or shall we settle this right here and now?

P. BILL: Settle what?

DIRECTOR: CUT! Look kid-why can't our just say the lines the way they are written? Is that too much to ask?

P. BILL: I just wanted to be sure that everyone's clear about what's going on.

DIRECTOR: It's very, very clear. Trust me. Now please just say the lines the way they are written! Alright! Let's get it right here! (CLAPS HIS HANDS HARD ON THE CLIPBOARD WHICH BRINGS THE GIRL FROM OFFSTAGE AGAIN)

GIRL #1: You killed him! You shot my love!

DIRECTOR; Nope, not yet sweetheart! (THE GIRLS WALKS BACKSTAGE AGAIN.)

GIRL #1: Oh, sorry!

(EVERYONE RESETS)

P. BILL: Well, you won't be the first man to say that right before he dies.

STRANGER: I think you got that backwards Bill.

(BOTH DRAW THEIR GUNS AND SHOTS RING OUT. PECOS BILLS MAKES A MELODRAMATIC FALL, PREFERABLY ON THE FRONT STAIRS GONG DOWN TO THE AUDIENCE. EVERYONE WAITS FOR THE GIRL TO RUN ON FOR HER PART NOW, BUT THERE'S NO SIGN OF HER. LONG SILENCE WITH NOTHING HAPPENING. FINALLY DIRECTOR CLAPS, THEN BANGS CLIPBOARD, BUT NOTHING BRINGS HER OUT.)

DIRECTOR: Somebody go check on the girl. (ANOTHER GIRL RUNS OFFSTAGE FRANTICALLY AND IS GONE FOR A FEW SECONDS AND THEN RETURNS BREATHLESSLY WITH THE NEWS.)

GIRL #3: She had to go to the bathroom, but she'll be right back.

DIRECTOR: Oh, great.

SINGER #1: Umm, excuse me, but could we please do our song now? I've got to leave pretty soon.

DIRECTOR: Pecos Bill's been shot! Your song won't work her!

SINGER #2: Well, I'm sorry, but we certainly do not have all day.

DIRECTOR: (FRUSTRATED AND RESINGED) Fine, go ahead.

ALL CAST: (SINGS AND DANCES THE THEME SONG. THEY HAVE TO KEEP STEPPING AROUND PECOS BILL WHO IS STILL ON THE FLOOR. EVERYONE BOWS; CURTAINS BEGINS TO CLOSE.)

GIRL #1: (RUNS OUT BEFORE THE CURTAIN IS COMPLETELY CLOSED.) You killed him! You shot my love!

DIRECTOR: Yep! Perfect! That's a wrap!