

# TEXAS

A MUSICAL ROMANCE OF PANHANDLE HISTORY

By PAUL GREEN



## *'Texas'* *Schedule*

"Texas," the musical history of the Texas Panhandle written by Paul Green, will play June 18-August 23 in 1975.

Performances are scheduled for 8:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Prices run from \$1 for children to \$5 for adults, dependent on performance night and seat location.

Call 806 - 655-2182 or write "Texas," Box 268, Canyon, Texas 79015, for further information.



60% of the audience traveled more than 100 miles to see the show.

34% were returning for the second (or third or even fortieth time).

In 1974 "TEXAS" drew more patrons than in previous years, played to 96% capacity from all states of the union and 66 foreign countries. Among the nations abroad, W. Germany sent the most, closely followed by Australia, Canada and England.

"TEXAS" IS EASY TO FIND — a few miles from five air lines, three bus lines, and five interstate highways. Local buses pick-up at any Canyon or Amarillo address for transportation to the Palo Duro and the show. Many cities in Texas and adjoining states have regular tours to the drama.

# The Dallas Morning News

AUGUST 18, 1974

## Text and Photos

By Terry Kliewer

CANYON, Texas — The stage is hundreds of miles and at least several cultures off Broadway.

So consequently, it's not surprising that the audience arrives in pickups, Winnebagos and 4-door sedans rather than limousines and taxis.

The actors are a combination of college students, local little theatre veterans and occasional refugees from the humdrum of East Coast summer stock.

And the theatre itself—well, it's as antithetical to Broadway as cattle cars are to subway trains.

The theatre occupies one small but well-chosen niche of the wandering, 130-mile-long expanse of Palo Duro Canyon, an eons-old scar of gigantic proportions across the face of the High Plains Caprock near Amarillo.

**THE THEATRE** is neither more nor less than absolutely perfect for the play. It offers a broad platform for dancing and alternating scenes, amphitheatre seating for 1,600 spectators and background scenery like no set designer could even begin to devise—a raw, craggy, multi-colored wall of limestone and granite towering 60 stories into the Panhandle sunset.

All these are the components of a unique theatrical production that, since its opening in 1966, has become a fixture of summers in the Texas Panhandle. The production is "Texas," and the title just about tells the story.

"Texas" playwright Paul Green labels his work "a symphonic outdoor drama of American life . . . with native ballads, dances, hymn tunes, folk-songs and worksongs, especially selected and edited by the author, and with additional light-and-sound effects."

What more could you ask?

Green's all-encompassing description sets the dimensions of the 2½ hour show. About the only limits on the script are, first, that it deals only with Panhandle history and, second, that it deals only with late 19th Century Panhandle history.

**EVERYTHING WITHIN** those bounds is fair game . . . cowboys, farmers, gold prospectors, Indians, prairie thunderstorms, drouth, square-dances, cattle drives, wagon trains, range fires, railroading and even state capital politics, circa 1880.

"Texas" is the story of a blustering, bull-headed Panhandle rancher known as Colonel Henry, in whose life are captured the predominant themes of the Texas of the last century.

Colonel Henry battles Indians, while befriending some (in the person of Chief Quanah Parker); battles nesters, chiefly youthful farmer-hero Calvin Armstrong; battles state officials who want to fence him in, and generally battles everyone and everything else that gets in his way.

In the end, it's progress that the Colonel is fighting hardest. The Colonel is the quintessential swaggering, self-aggrandizing Texas cattleman of yesteryear—as such, he cares little for new-fangled ways that will cut him to size.

The colonel's nemesis is Calvin Armstrong, blatant romantic and unapologetic idealist whose burning cause is progress for the Panhandle. Progress to Calvin is railroads, fences and people.

**THAT PROGRESS**, of course, will come, with or without Calvin Armstrong. The resolution of the drama comes when Colonel Henry realizes the fact and climbs down off his high-horse, as the West Texas expression goes, to shake Calvin's plow-toughened hand.

Along the way, "Texas" offers sing-

ing, dancing, adventure and romance. And, along the way, "Texas" takes full advantage of its natural rugged setting to deepen the dramatic impact of the production.

The 600-foot bluff which forms the backdrop for Palo Duro Canyon's Pioneer Amphitheatre is an integral part of "Texas." It is neither the steepest nor the loftiest cliff overlooking the canyon floor, but it is the only one offering the precise mix of visual and audio potential sought by amphitheatre builders in 1960.

Visually, the ponderous canyon wall provides a brooding presence, a solemn reminder of man's once-small place in the trackless Panhandle plains of centuries past.

**FOR AUDIO** technicians, the canyon wall represents a giant sounding board, off which to bounce music and special effects from outsized stereo concert speakers.

And, at least twice during the play, the canyon wall serves as a gargantuan prop.

At the beginning of the play, a lone, flag-bearing horseman stands silhouetted against the setting sun far up on the lip of the bluff as a solitary trumpet sounds mournfully down below.

Later, technicians use the steep canyon wall as a near-vertical hanger for a 500-foot-long rope of nitro-glycerine primer cord, ignited during a thunderstorm sequence for a frighteningly effective simulation of prairie lightning.

**THE MOOD** fostered by all this—from the boisterous, good-humored play to the rugged, oak tree-dotted canyon to cool Panhandle breeze wending through the darkened amphitheatre — is precisely what "Texas" producers were after nine years ago when they launched the show.

In 1966, Texas appeared a far-flung locale for a production scripted by

Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Paul Green, a famous native son of North Carolina. While Green's forte is outdoor drama, he had never done one west of the Mississippi River.

Having won the Pulitzer Prize in drama in 1927 for his racially sensitive "In Abraham's Bosom," Green had gone on to write a conspicuously successful outdoor drama called "The Lost Colony." It first went into production in 1937 at Roanoke Island, N.C., and it's still running today.

Almost as long-running as his Roanoke Island production is Green's "The Common Glory" at Williamsburg, Va. With these and other dramas to his credit, Green has come to be acknowledged as the dean of American outdoor theater.

A magazine article on Green and his productions drew the attention of Mrs. Margaret Harper, one of the earliest backers of the fledgling Pioneer Amphitheatre project back in 1960.

**SHE PRESENTED** the idea of a Green folk drama for Palo Duro Canyon to her husband, Ples, head of the West Texas State University language department, and to William A. Moore, WTSU drama department head, and his wife Margaret.

The four, talking the idea over at dinner one evening, decided to approach Green. Mrs. Harper wrote the playwright; he astonished them by accepting the invitation and began moving ahead with the drafting of what would become "Texas," his first outdoor drama west of the Mississippi.

The construction of \$350,000 Pioneer Amphitheatre began in 1961, shepherded by the newly-formed Texas Panhandle Heritage Foundation.

The theatre was finished in 1964. Theatre officials bided their time with minor productions, the most notable of which was a light and sound spec-

tacular called "Thundering Sounds of the West." By the spring of 1966, Green was ready with "Texas."

**THE AMPHITHEATRE'S** first season of "Texas," directed by Moore, was a success. The production drew Panhandle residents like a magnet. Over ensuing seasons, increasing numbers of non-Panhandlers, and even non-Americans, have filled out the audience. Total attendance passed 500,000 last year.

A commemorative triangle, like those once used to call ranchhands to chow, is handed to an overseas visitor for having come the longest distance to see the play. The roster includes visitors from Australia, Japan, France . . . you name it.

What draws foreign visitors to "Texas" is not hard to pin down—it's sheer Americana, in the best tradition of Gunsmoke" (without the shooting) and "Wagon Train."

For Texans, the stopoff to see "Texas" represents a sort of pilgrimage, perhaps unintended. Beyond the dazzling choreography, the songs, the sometimes schmaltzy humor and the strained but heroic storyline, Texans can glimpse a little of their forefathers' rough hewn lives.

They can glimpse a little of their own roots, glimpse the changes brought by time over the past half-century and, in looking at the quarter-billion-year-old canyon around them, maybe even glimpse a little of the basic changelessness of it all.

**677,000 PEOPLE  
HAVE SEEN  
"TEXAS"**

