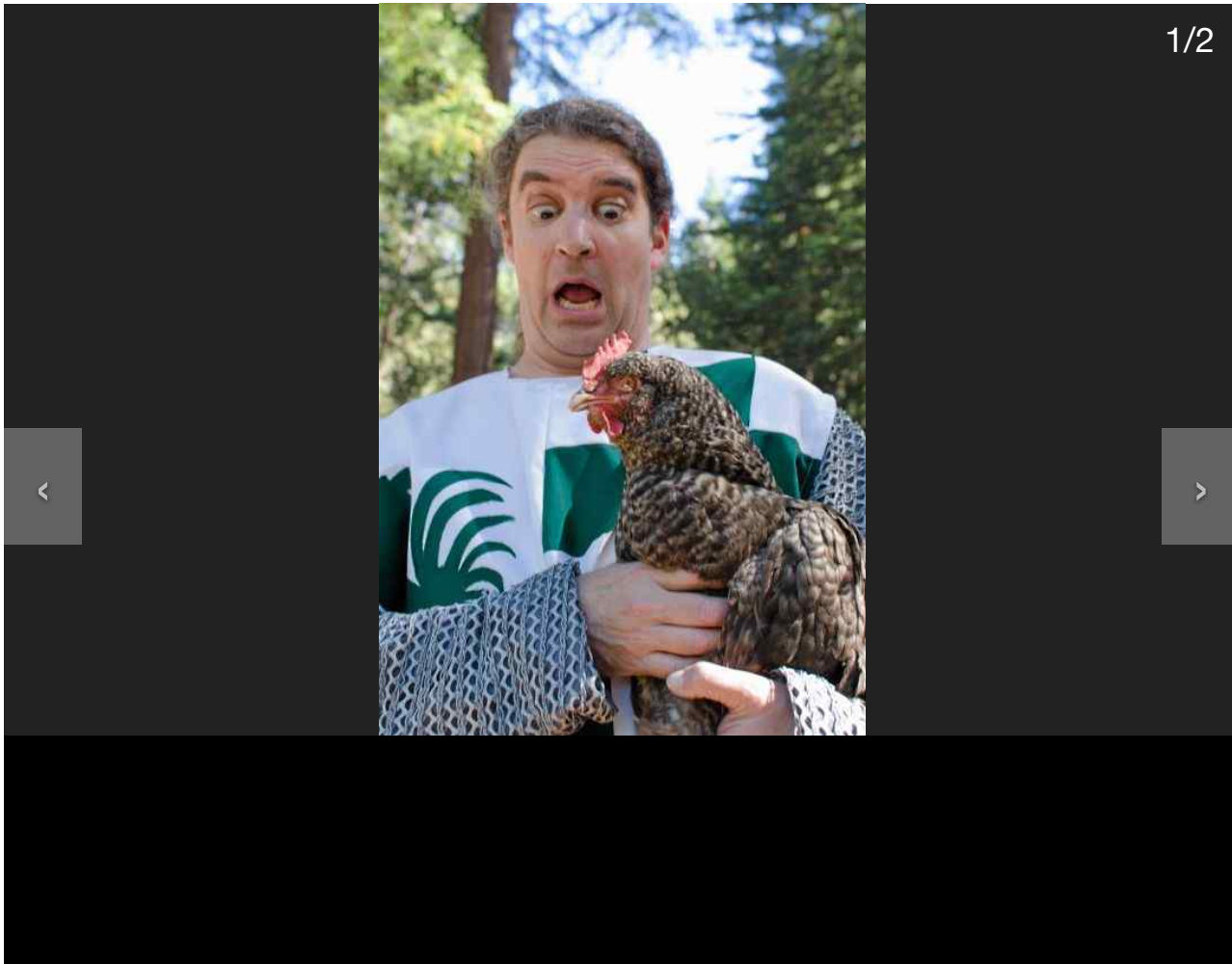


# Review: MCT's 'Spamalot' an evening of gloriously silly entertainment



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The redoubtable Eric Idle (part of the original Monty Python gang) threw every sight joke and every pun he knows into the slapstick, inventive and very watchable musical "Spamalot," which took Broadway by storm in 2005 and will now, no doubt, be packing Park Hall in Ben Lomond for the next three weekends, courtesy of the Mountain Community Theater company.

On opening night, the near sell-out crowd obviously appreciated the absurdity and flat-out audacity of Idle's merry band of wackos who skewer anything and anyone in their wake. And, because much of "Spamalot" is, in Idle's words, "ripped off" from the [1975] motion picture "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," those who are long-time Monty Python aficionados are in hog heaven.

The real tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table has very little in common with "Spamalot," other than, of course, the character's names and some similar personality traits. But the musical is laced with

such parody and silliness that it's not a good idea to attend expecting something like "Camelot" or even "Robin Hood" here.

The remarkably adaptive Karin Babbitt kicks off the evening with a 10-guffaw pre-show speech about cell phones, exits, etc. that is likely the most amusing one possible. In a heavy British accent (sometimes difficult to decipher), she drones on and on and then walks off after telling the audience that the show takes place in England. Suddenly a crowd of villagers appears slapping fake fish about as they sing the "Fisch Schlapping Song." Babbitt runs on stage yelling "Finland??? I said 'England!' so the villagers take their leave and the show begins.

After a monk face-smacking routine, King Arthur (an immensely likeable and earnest W. Scott Whisler) appears with his trusty servant/steed Patsy (pert Kara Brodhead, she of the thousand facial expressions). Brodhead gets laughs just by banging two coconut shells together to emulate the sound of a horse's hooves; her wide eyes and deadpan looks are ideal in this role.

Arthur is galloping along to recruit men to join him as his "knights" of the Round Table. He eventually succeeds, but not before a marvelously inventive song, "He is Not Dead Yet," wherein a large pile of "dead" people are pulled in by cart and Sir Robin (a credible Dave Halper) and Sir Lancelot (Michael LaMere, who makes a surprising character change in Act 2) try to put one last "dead" body onto the pile. But the body (a versatile Declan Brennan as "Not Dead Fred") refuses and sings the "Not Dead" song. Thoroughly captivating.

It's this constant lampooning of everything and every "body" that makes "Spamalot" so winning. Just when it seems the musical can't get any more amusing, the beautiful, multi-talented Naomi Gorham appears as the mysterious Lady of the Lake to join Arthur in singing the droll duet "The Song That Goes Like This."

Gorham is the real deal. When she's on stage she's downright dynamic. And when she realizes she doesn't have a big enough role, she sings in Act 2, "The Diva's Lament" subtitled "Whatever Happened to My Part?" – for which she received an almost-standing ovation. T-riffic. Gorham also gets to wear the most stunning outfits (courtesy of costume designers Maggi Hoogs and Susan McKay and a huge passel of costume makers).

To recap more of the storyline is a waste because so much of "Spamalot" is based on double entendre, puns and madcap silliness. Sure, there are parts that stretch credibility (a tiny but apparently evil rabbit, the Knights Who Say Ni), and there are sight jokes galore. Case in point: Right after King Arthur cuts off first one, then both of the Black Knight's arms, a woman walks in with a basket and scoops them up. Her basket has a sign "Arms for the Poor." (Alms, get it?)

And then there's the so not-PC song, "You Won't Succeed on Broadway (without a Jew)." Though it sounds offensive, it really isn't. In fact, it's darned funny.

Most of the time director Kathie Kratochvil succeeds in corralling her large, diverse cast in all this absurdity. She's aided by music and vocal director Arindam Krishna Das, who leads her small orchestra of six from their loft atop the castle at the back of the stage.

Kate Longini Pratt makes the Park Hall stage more accessible to the audience by creating two large stone castles, stage right and left, with a fashion-show runway and steps leading down the center aisle into the audience.

One more don't-miss moment merits mention: Babbitt is joined by Karen Solomon as the two hilarious French "taunters" high atop the castle walls.

Actually, there's a lot not to miss. So: Don't.

## **'Spamalot'**

**Presented by:** Mountain Community Theater

**When:** Friday and Saturdays at 8 p.m. through Oct. 25. Sundays at 2 p.m. on Oct. 12 and 19.

**Where:** Park Hall, 9400 Mill St., Ben Lomond.

**Tickets:** \$25 general; \$20 seniors and students.

**Details:** [www.mctshows.org](http://www.mctshows.org) or [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com)