



Coastal Culture

REVIEW: Heartwood's 'Cyrano de Bergerac' is a considerable work of art

by Tamara Lilly
Coastal Journal contributor

NEWCASTLE — As a theater person who knows what a rough place a show can be in three nights before opening, I was prepared to give Heartwood's production of "Cyrano de Bergerac" a good bit of leeway for dress rehearsal hiccups. Producers reminded us at the invitational preview July 20 that there are "still a few unpainted set pieces and two pages of details to finish up over the next two days."

However, this production of "Cyrano" is ready for its run.

There were areas of blocking where I could see a bit of hesitation, in a section that still needs a bit of smoothing out. There were a couple of times when lines were stumbled over, or slowed as an actor searched for the correct words, but very subtly and perhaps not noticeable to someone not familiar with the look and sound of that.

I have to admit that I was not fully aware of just why this production is a classic. My experience has been limited to the Steve Martin movie, caricatures of Cyrano, and snippets from

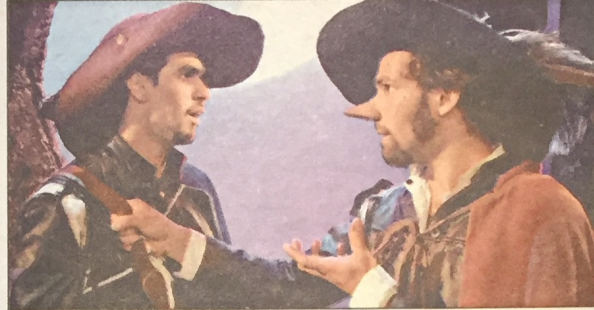
a time I played an actress who was playing Roxanne in a farce.

I was not prepared for what has clearly propelled this story through the centuries: A beautifully considered storyline with a poetic tapestry of words that is not limited to one or two monologues, but woven through scenes of charm and wit, as well as romance and tragedy.

The cast is full of actors who have chosen to spend their summer months in Midcoast Maine, but whose training and experience bring them from across the country and around the world. By and large, they present the script in a way that is accessible for the audience that sometimes flowery prose is not.

The role of Cyrano is played deftly by Lukas Raphael of New York. His bio reflects a good bit of experience with Shakespeare, which no doubt has prepared him for presenting a very wordy script in a way that is eloquent, easily understood and entertaining.

Sometimes with Shakespeare, the language gets in the way (this is not a complaint, just a truth that audiences can sometimes lose the thread when phraseology of another era is



Cyrano (Lukas Raphael) and Christian (Michael Golino) seeking the love of the same woman, in "Cyrano de Bergerac," running July 23 to Aug. 1, at Heartwood.

Courtesy photo

present). In this case, the beautiful translation by poet Brian Hooker, as well as Raphael's talented presentation, lend themselves to a show where I only drifted away from the text a couple of times, and that might have been because I was focusing on a tech or costume detail here or there.

Raphael uses the range of his voice, the speed of his delivery and the use of his body (in

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subtle and overt movement) to create such a dialogue that you hang on every word. He makes Cyrano's sharp wit and loving heart his own.

He seemed a little distracted by the audience at the very beginning, and a little off point in his final scene. But those are exactly the things that come together in the last days before a production. Sometimes the best magic is with the chemical reaction that happens when you add the ingredient of an opening night audience, and I'm expecting you'll be blown away by that final scene in a few days.

Let's talk about that nose. I have held this belief that the nose would be a distraction, that you can't get much beyond the farce of the story with ... that nose.

Again — I underestimated the text. And in this case, the nose is treated not as an attachment, but as the living, breathing pro-uberance that Cyrano lived with all his days.

Katie Machaiek, originally from Owls Head, now working as a makeup artist in Los Angeles, has done a fabulous job with this nose. Most of the time, you cannot see where the prosthetic begins, only under certain light and even then, the glimpse is fleeting.

The color, shape, and mobility are all very realistic and it does not take long to settle in and forget the nose — well — as much as you can when it is indeed a part of the plot and has scenes devoted to it.

I had this fear of it falling off. It's a very physical show and Raphael is sweating profusely at times, but that baby is affixed well. That mechanism working

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is a key to the willing suspension of disbelief. Having it done so well is a gift to the cast and the crew.

Costuming is lovely for the show. Period, yet not overdone. The cast seems comfortable with occasional clumsiness with the capes which, I'm sure, those of the period experienced, too.

The set is minimal. Boxes and ramps, a tree trunk and a camouflage net utilized in various configurations to represent the scene. This mechanic worked well and the costumes, acting and action paints the vast majority of the picture.

There was lovely use of lighting in a few particular places, including backlighting of the scrim for fight scenes. The fight scenes were just the right balance of believability and stylization to be entertaining and not seem hokey.

Swordplay plays a big part in this story, and fight director Mark Bedell did a great job of choreographing what I see as fighting dance numbers.

Director Griff Braley made many excellent choices to get the production to this point, I'm sure, but one in particular that I really loved was that during scene changes, when several of the cast and crew were onstage rearranging the large set pieces quickly, he arranged for the movement of the story to continue — with spotlighted fight scenes or vignettes of Roxanne and Cyrano. A fantastic way to get the set changes done and keep the audience engaged in the story without those awkward interruptions to the flow that set changes are traditionally.

The lighter moments in the play were the strongest, and there are plenty — whether Cyrano's torrential quick-wit-

ted monologues or the scenes of creative ensemble banter.

The serious moments were, however, still credible. Cyrano's best friend, La Bret, is played with subtlety and realism by Stephen Shore, and the lovely Roxanne is performed with considerable stage presence by Marina Shay. A tricky role to play convincingly, as she needs to be passionate and intelligent, while not so inquisitive as to actually catch on to the truth.

The remaining and supporting characters — and those who play poets, soldiers, cooks and other roles alternately are, by and large, one dimensional. This is a combination of how they are written and how they are portrayed.

If this play is a painting, or better yet a photo, Cyrano — at the center — is in sharp focus with soft focus on those in immediate proximity and the remainder of the cast, set and tech to complete the background and framework around him.

It's a fantastic piece of art, I encourage you to view it.

Eight performances will run between July 23 and Aug. 1, in the Parker Poe Theater at Lincoln Academy. Times and ticket prices vary. For full details, visit heartwoodtheater.org, email info@heartwoodtheater.org or phone 563-1373. Sellouts are common in this 150 seat space — reservations are very strongly recommended.

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