

TheatreWorks' comic 'Cyrano' stays true to original



Cyrano (J. Anthony Crane) steals a moment with Roxane (Sharon Rietkerk) in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's "Cyrano." (Courtesy Kevin Berne)

STORY AREA

By Jean Schiffman on April 12, 2016 12:01 am

"Cyrano" starts off in contemporary fashion, with the actors wandering casually onstage before the house lights dim.

They adjust their costumes (an appealing mix of 17th-century and modern apparel by Fumiko Bielefeldt), assemble parts of designer Joe Ragey's expansive set and even chat with audience members.

Yet Michael Hollinger and Aaron Posner's 2011 adaptation of 19th-century French playwright Edmond Rostand's classic "Cyrano de Bergerac," a romance set in 17th century Paris, is no metatheatrical spoof.

The script may be streamlined (although at nearly two and three-quarters hours, it needs cutting in the lax second act), but the story (elucidated by Michael Gene Sullivan as occasional narrator) and the modern yet slightly formal language entirely respect the original.

So does TheatreWorks' engaging production, directed by Robert Kelley to be gently humorous right up to a touching, if unavoidably sentimental, ending.

Master swordsman, wit and poet Cyrano, generally admired and somewhat feared by fellow Parisians and cadets in his regiment (whatever you do, don't utter the word nose in his presence), is in love with his cousin ("second cousin," he reminds everyone pointedly) Roxane. But he but knows she'd never love anyone as ugly — as big-nosed — as him (nor, as he stoically admits, would any other woman).

When a new member of his regiment, the dashing Christian, suddenly falls in love with her, too — but lacks the silver tongue with which to woo her — our hero becomes the young man's stand-in, ghost-writing his love letters and feeding him poetic lines in whispers as the two hover beneath her balcony in the moonlight.

J. Anthony Crane is a terrific Cyrano — proudly anti-social and arrogant, with a tough exterior masking a delicate interior. The rapport between him and Chad Deverman as a charmingly tonguetied Christian ("I don't have a way with words," he confesses, to which Cyrano responds, wryly, "Which is all I have") is perfectly calibrated.

As the object of their ardor, Sharon Rietkerk strikes just the right notes of youthful and yearning

impetuosity that matures, by play's end, into a deeper understanding of human nature.

Amid a uniformly strong cast (most actors in multiple roles), Darren Bridgett's drunk poet is a particular comic delight, as are a tour-de-force sword fight (directed by Jonathan Rider) and "Gascony Guard Song," written by Hollinger and belled out by the rambunctious soldiers.

REVIEW

Cyrano

Presented by TheatreWorks Silicon Valley

Where: Center for the Performing Arts, 500 Castro St., Mountain View

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays: 8 p.m. Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays; closes May 1

Tickets: \$19 to \$80

Contact: (650) 463-1960, www.theatreworks.org

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