

## Theater review: This 'Cyrano' is a winner by more than a nose

Graydon Royce, November 3, 2004

Once again, I find myself compelled to write about actor Steve Hendrickson's natural grace and stage brilliance. I have no financial interest in Hendrickson's acting career, so let's be done with suspicion and consider his splendid work as "Cyrano de Bergerac" in a Ten Thousand Things production spilling over with swashbuckling chivalry and heart-rending pathos.

"Bravo!" shouted the eager audience at the conclusion of Thursday's performance at the Roseville correctional facility for women, and their reaction seemed sharp and correct.

Director Michelle Hensley has shaken the dust from several translations of Edmond Rostand's classic and produced a crisp, lively adaptation chock full of juicy wordplay, clear storytelling and a delicious sense of verse-filled humor. Her cast responds in a physically crisp and articulate staging.

"Cyrano's" story should be well-known by now. He's the guy long on eloquence and short on physical beauty (the nose!) who loves Roxane. He gives his words to a chiseled hunk of soldier so he can woo her. In the playing, "Cyrano" bristles with daring, bravery, whimsy and conniving. In its theme, though, this is a delicate poem of romance from the heart, an aching example of surrendering one's soul for another. Hendrickson strikes into Cyrano's inflated confidence and verbal dexterity with the panache of a pro wrestler. Mere mortals pose no challenge to his razor tongue and wit, and Hendrickson lets fly these lacerating ripostes with a fluency that coats the jagged edges. Simply by posing, bearing sword and word, his prowess commands the scene.

As easy as this swagger comes to Hendrickson's portrayal, his countenance can fall in the twinkling of an eye, plunging him into Cyrano's



**Steve Hendrickson as Cyrano  
and Sonja Parks as Roxane**

deep well of vulnerability.

"To be laughed at is the one thing I fear," he admits with the fragility of an insecure schoolboy.

Ron Menzel feeds off Hendrickson's agility just as his character, Christian, draws his spirit from Cyrano. Menzel is a big slab of dark tousled hair, square jaw and burning eyes. He uses these gifts, and his stage acumen, to effectively look heroic and clumsy at the same time -- a charming, impetuous frat boy, if you will.

Sonja Parks is Roxane, the third leg of this love triangle. She's pleasant and makes her voice heard, but seems a little lost in the charisma and broad comic strokes of the other main players. Maren Ward, who has been building her chops with aggressively fearless work at Bedlam Theatre, has a hilarious natural instinct that marks her florid performance in a couple of secondary roles.

Hensley orchestrates all of this with a perfect eye. In pace, energy, grasp of theme, she has assembled a production that laughs and cries with its title character. It's a beautiful thing to behold.