

Fifteenth Season  
**Tennessee Repertory Theatre**

David Grapes, Executive Producing Director

presents

*Cyrano*  
DE BERGERAC

by

**Edmond Rostand**

Directed by

**Todd Olson**

Dramaturg

**Robert Neblett**

Stage Manager

**Sheron D. Thorp**

Scenic Designer

**Gary C. Hoff**

Costume Designer

**Jan Tax**

Composer

**Andrew Hopson**

Additional Costumes

**Lane Fragomeli**

Properties Master

**Steven Lepley**

Lighting Designer

**John R. Malinowski**

Hair & Make-up Designer

**Lane Fragomeli**

Fight Choreographer

**Michael G. Chin**

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## Dramaturg's Note

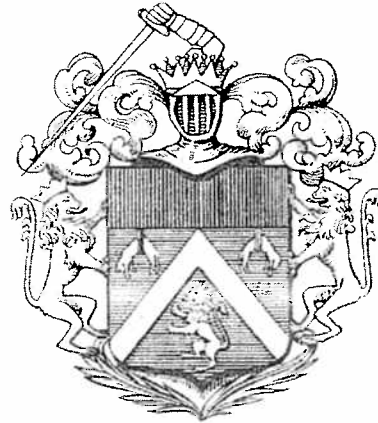
Everyone is familiar with the story of Cyrano de Bergerac, whether they know it or not.

A man helps a friend woo the woman that he himself secretly loves by supplying romantic words of poetry, but ultimately stands alone in the shadows while his rival claims the prized kiss. This is a common story that has become as clichéd as last week's sitcoms or an after-school special.

And yet...

And yet, we return to Edmond Rostand's original play time and again, enraptured by its rich language and swashbuckling humor, caught up in the wonder of its moonlight balcony scene – second only to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in its passion, and hoping against hope that we can ever find a love as pure in our own lives, if even for a split second. I myself have worked as an actor or dramaturg on three productions of *Cyrano* so far in my short theatrical career, and I will gladly work on many more before I'm through. Why? This play touches me unlike any other. Just when I think I've had enough, I hear Cyrano ask Roxane, "And what is a kiss, when all is done?" and I must stay for the answer, with a smile on my face and a tear in my eye.

What was Rostand trying to do when he wrote this "heroic comedy in five acts" in 1897? His Modern contemporaries were busy composing stark realistic dramas with psychologically complex characters that spoke in the natural prose of normal, everyday speech. These plays dealt with the burning social issues of the day – divorce, feminism, poverty, substance abuse, and mental illness. Yet *Cyrano de Bergerac* stands in sharp contrast with these late 19th century theatrical trends. Here we have a romantic comedy written almost entirely in rhyming Alexandrine couplets, whose events (more drawn from legend than authentic history) occur approximately two and a half centuries prior to its composition, and whose sentimentality often borders on the melodramatic. But this



Cyrano's historical family crest

contrast is exactly Rostand's intent. By writing *Cyrano*, he attempts to reverse time, to return to a theatrical tradition of lofty speech and even loftier emotions, to rekindle a spark of idealism that is in danger of being snuffed out by an increasing sense of cynicism in early Modern art and literature. Rostand gives us not the common man, but a timeless superman whose poetic soul and bravery transcend the ages. Cyrano seems to emerge from every fray triumphant, restoring to a weary world the ideals of chivalry, love, and hope.

In short, what Rostand gives us is a hero.

But why Cyrano, of all people? He is the title character in one of the most romantic plays ever written, and yet he doesn't get the girl. Ironically, this very paradox is his appeal. He speaks for lover and lovelorn alike. A self-proclaimed Don Quixote, Cyrano tilts at windmills of mediocrity, nobly wrestling against the monsters of falsehood, prejudice, compromise, and cowardice. With his last breath he exclaims, "But I have never fought to win. No! The most glorious struggle is that which is doomed from the start!" And what a battle! His entire life is a quest for beauty, but not the surface beauty of a pretty face, but rather that of a single tender gesture, a kind word, an instant of selflessness. He shows us the nobility in sacrifice, the strength in humility, the poetry in the mundane, and the wisdom in a little lunacy now and then.

--Robert Neblett, Dramaturg