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## Action-Packed Musketeers at HVSF

by **Abby Luby**

Of all the great stories from our youth, *The Three Musketeers* will always hold the allure and fantasy of bold and fearless adventurers. The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival brings the *Musketeers* alive with playwright Ken Ludwig's stage adaptation of Alexandre Dumas's 1840 novel. Ludwig's wonderfully embellished play allows the HVSF company to put their own creative stamp on a production rich in action and humor.



L to R Lily Narbonne, Stephen Paul Johnson, Angela Janus, Michael Borrelli, Kyle Nunn

The night this reviewer was at Boscobel, there were as many children as adults in the audience - and the appeal was universal. Director Christopher Edwards has perfected the balance between dialogue and highly skilled, choreographed wrestling and sword fights. Kudos to Fight Director Brad Lemons for well-calibrated, edgy jousts - sublime dances of dexterity, each sword-wielding brawl eliciting spontaneous applause.

Taylor Walsh, in his HVSF debut, is perfectly cast as the young D'Artagnon. Walsh is light on his feet and manages to fly through the air like a weightless gymnast. His D'Artagnon is brash but gracefully klutzy - he has the young women in the audience swooning and the older ones projecting a dose of maternal angst. Ludwig, (who just authored the wonderful *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*) added the character Sabine as D'Artagnon's younger sister, played by Angela Janas, who is terrifically goofy, especially when she breaks from her tomboy role into her libidinous hankering for Aramis, played by the dashing Kyle Nunn.



Taylor Walsh

Ryan Quinn, as D'Artagnon's father and mentor, engages his son in a final lesson of combat as the play opens. The two men flip around the stage in a skirmish replete with groans and grunts; Quinn adroitly holds the father-son tension as he teaches his son how to defend himself while tearfully sending him off to become a Musketeer. Quinn, in another role (he miraculously jockeys five additional roles in the play), gives us a death scene right out of Monty Python. Flailing around just before his final collapse, Quinn is the human re-enactment of a pop-culture trailer, segueing between Michael Jackson's dance moves from *Beat It*, Dorothy's 'dream' lines from the *Wizard of Oz* to uttering "Rosebud" from the famous film *Citizen Kane*.



L to R Kyle Nunn, Mark Couchot

Scoring high on hilarity is Michael Borelli as the pouting King Louis XIII, given to carefree cart wheels, brandishing a Bronx accent that drifts into valley girl lingo. Borelli perfectly executes effeminate gestures while he prances around in period high heels, twirling an umbrella, often breaking the faux erudition by tugging on his wedgie. His best line: “Oh God. I love being King!” Chiara Motley perfectly portrays the king’s flighty Queen Anne and Mark Couchot is both villainous and daffy as Count de Rochefort.



Michael Borrelli

Stephen Paul Johnson is perfect as the nasty Cardinal Richelieu, wielding his evil power and who conspires to rule France; his demise at the end is heartily cheered. Musketeer Porthos is convincingly played by Charlie Francis Murphy, who is both Richelieu's serious adversary and cocky swordsman. Thrown into a battle of soldiers armed with rifles, the ambivalent Porthos questions the validity of religious-based war, asking if Christians were really killing each other over "how much Latin they can use in church?" The message of the church strong-arming the state can't be overlooked.



L to R Mark Couchot - Lily Narbonne

Daniel Morgan Shelley soulfully plays Athos, the more somber of the three Musketeers and whose back story of lost love gives him pause to opine on how love really means the death of hope. Eleanor Handley as Milady, Richelieu's heinous, sassy co-conspirator, offers up a clever and sexy evil temptress. At the end, Milady meets her match at the hand of Sabine in a dazzling fight where both women masterfully clash, sword against sword. Lily Narbonne is the sweet Constance Bonacieux, who nicely sustains a wholesome innocence and is well matched to Walsh's D'Artagnan.



L to R Charlie Francis Murphy - Kyle Nunn

Sound Designer William Neal expertly chooses recorded, programmatic music that announces various scenes and moods throughout the show. Highlighting post intermission, Edwards has the full cast rocking the stage in a foot-stomping rendition of *Kiss* by Prince, (“you don’t have to be beautiful.....you don’t have to be rich.....to be my girl”) - a favorite that encourages one to clap and sing along.

The energy of this show is contagious and elicits frequent bursts of applause, especially for the super real sword swinging, incredible hand to hand combat and hard knock tumbles - captivating both kids and adults. A warning to those kids (of any age) who sit in front: you may suddenly find actors, in character, affably landing nearby or briefly falling in your lap to merely joke around. These impromptu, live-theater exchanges are priceless.

This is one of three plays in the HVSF’s 27th season, the other two are *King Lear*, directed by the festival’s Founding Artistic Director, Terrence O’Brien, and *All’s Well That Ends Well* directed by Russell Treyz. The season runs through the September 1, 2013.

*All photos by William Marsh*

***Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival***

***HVSF Info and Tickets***

**Box Office: 845 - 265-9575.**