The Outlook Shakespeare Festival Newsletter • Summer 2008

Allison McLemore as Roxane Panache

By Catherine Pressimone Beckowski

hen *Cyrano de Bergerac* debuted on the Parisian stage in 1897, it was a sensation. Like many popular Broadway shows today, the original production at the Porte St. Martin Theatre was sold out months in advance and competing plays struggled to attract audiences. Much of the play's success springs from its bold and fluid mélange of story, conflict, and character.

And what a character! As one of the most beloved and daring roles in the theatre canon, it is fitting that Cyrano should be played by one of PSF's most beloved and

accomplished actors, Greg Wood. Last season marked Wood's 19th and 20th roles for PSF as Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*. Other PSF roles range from the dashing Elyot in *Private Lives* to the title role in *Hamlet*.

Earlier this year, Wood created the role of Martin Luther in the new play *Wittenberg* at Philadelphia's Arden Theatre Company; he and his wife also welcomed a baby daughter in March. Now, he is looking forward to this summer's challenge.

"Cyrano is one of my favorite plays ever," he says. "In the late eighties, the Royal

Shakespeare Company came over with Derek Jacobi and Sinead Cusack in a double bill with *Much Ado about Nothing*. I saw their production and it reconfirmed my decision to be an actor. It hit on everything it was supposed to be—poetic, romantic, heroic, touching—and it has always stayed with me."

Almost as famous as the title character is *Cyrano's* Roxane—a celebrated role for women that has been portrayed by famous actresses from Sarah Bernhardt to Jennifer Garner. This summer, PSF welcomes newcomer Allison McLemore to the com-

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NOTES FROM THE PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The director of a local foundation, one of our funders, said to me recently, "The Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival signifies summer itself to us," referring to his family, who has been attending for years. Another patron said, "The Feetival is the highlight of



Patrick Mulcahy

Festival is the highlight of the year for our family." That got me thinking about what the Festival means to me, to those who work here, and to you, our patrons.

So, here's the plan. I'll share a few initial thoughts of my own, I'll ask some of the artists who work here, and I'll ask you. Then, in the fall issue of *The Quill*, we'll see what everyone had to say.

My preliminary thoughts about PSF are not just my personal feelings about what it means to me, but what I see and sense in the Festival when artists and patrons meet in the same space, breathe the same air, and share in something unique and wonderful.

To me the Festival is freedom, a gift, community, a veil between the worlds, a mirror for the life force, for beauty, and for the profane we must come to know. It's inspiration, a peek under the rock, an honest question, profound penetrating insights, joy, a labor of love, a temple of invisible yet tangible transactions, a place where the invisible becomes visible, magic, spontaneity, the crackling now, the knife's edge, Everest. It's evidence that we are only here for a short time, and proof that we have not given up.

The Festival is freedom: to laugh harder than you can perhaps anywhere else, to feel things we spend most of our day trying not to feel, to let the corners of our personalities soften just enough to let our souls through, to see again what we have forgotten about ourselves. The Festival is a release into more and less: more life, vitality, authenticity, fullness, more joy, and less worry, constraint, deadening, metronomic time, less rigidity.

It's different for each of us, no doubt. So what does it mean to you? E-mail me at psf@desales.edu. We won't use what you write without your permission, so write freely. ■

Cyrano, continued from page 1

pany. She recently played Eliza in Creede Repertory Theatre's production of *Pygmalion* and was also seen in Agatha Christie's *Black Coffee* at Elizabeth Wallace Theater of the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina.

McLemore readily identifies with Roxane. "She is so smart and driven. She sees what she thinks is right and goes for it. She is soulful and funny." McLemore particularly looks forward to exploring Roxane's depth. "She grows a lot as the play progresses. I'm excited to explore how her ideas about love change and mature."

With the intimacy of the characters' inner lives so poetically illuminated, it may be tempting to think of the play as a drawing room romance. The scale is huge: *Cyrano de Bergerac* will be the largest production in PSF history, requiring a cast of 30 (playing more than 60 characters).

"With 30 actors, you still experience the pageantry and excitement of crowd scenes and the intimacy of the play," explains director Dennis Razze. "Even though the play has a panoramic scope, the focus is really on the intimate love triangle of Cyrano, Roxane, and Christian." (Christian, the handsome young soldier who uses Cyrano's poetry to win the heart of Roxane, will be played by Spencer Plachy, who played Freddy in PSF's production of *My Fair Lady*.)

Surveying the big picture, Razze acknowledges that some of the greatest challenges of presenting the play are technical. "The play demands a number of wonderful 17th century costumes that have to be authentic and quite lavish. Every character is wigged, and some characters have to wear multiple wigs, so we have someone specifically in charge of that." (Martha Ruskai, who designed the wigs and makeup for *Amadeus* last season, returns to PSF for this produc-

tion. She is also responsible for constructing Cyrano's nose, a process that began with a special "nose summit" in early May.)

As if directing the entire production wasn't quite challenging enough, Razze is composing an original score. "Music is essential in a play like this," he says. "Because of the epic nature of the play, the music needs to have epic proportions—large brass ensembles, rich strings, and the percussive energy of battle. The music must also support the romance and poetry of the play and not detract from it. I'm inspired by the best film composers for this score—certainly John Williams among them. But the music must also have the flavor of the 17th century Baroque style of composers like Jean Baptiste Lully and Charpentier, who both wrote scores for Moliére."

For all the opulence and epic qualities of Cyrano, at its heart lies an honest, human story. "It's very iconic in many ways, and I think the challenge is to maintain *Cyrano's* humanity and not make him so grandiose that people can't connect," Wood observes. "Everyone in the play has something they feel is a deficiency that makes them feel unaccepted. That's what the story is about. It's not about how good a swordsman you are or how many ladies you uphold; it's that you are enough just being yourself."

"It's a beautiful story that has a little something for everyone: danger, jokes, poetry, and love," adds McLemore. "It's also full of such rich, colorful characters—people that are larger than life and compelling to watch."

All of these attributes are skillfully rendered through Anthony Burgess' sumptuous translation. McLemore is eager for the challenge. "Working on a script like this is a dream come true!"

Catherine Pressimone Beckowski is a 2006 DeSales University graduate working toward her master's degree in Dramaturgy at the State University of New York, Stony Brook.

Discovering Cyrano

When it comes to *Cyrano de Bergerac*, great actors and the great script have always gone hand in hand. But which came first?

It was actually the renowned French actress Sarah Bernhardt who discovered the unknown Edmund Rostand, and introduced the famed actor Constant Coquelin to his work. Coquelin was so impressed by Rostand's writing that he made him an irresistible offer: "In my opinion, you are destined to become the greatest dramatic

poet of the age; I bind myself here and now to take any play you write...without reading it, to cancel any engagements I may have, and produce your play with the least possible delay." Seeking a work worthy of Coquelin, Rostand found inspiration in the writing of the real Cyrano—and the rest is history.

Qtd. in Church, Oscar and Henry Ward Kuhns. Introduction. Cyrano de Bergerac. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1931. p. vii.









Left to right: Anthony Lawton, Erin Clare Hurley, Carl N. Wallnau, John Ahlin. Photos by Lee A. Butz

TWELVE FACTS ABOUT TWELFTH NIGHT

By Lisa Higgins

I. The title *Twelfth Night* refers to the twelfth night after Christmas, which commemorates the visit of the three Magi and the revelation of Christ's divinity to them. However, the play makes no reference to these biblical events.

II. The title Twelfth Night, or What You Will is Shakespeare's only play that has a double title and, according to legend, comes from a quote from Shakespeare, "Call my play what you will."

Shakespeare play to include a cross-dressing heroine: Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Merchant of Venice, Cymbeline, and As You Like It all feature cross-dressing women.

W. Probably written by 1601, Twelfth Night was written after Hamlet and before Measure for Measure.

V. The character of Orsino may have been inspired by a real Italian duke entertained at court by Queen Elizabeth. In the play, Duke Orsino begins the action with one of Shakespeare's most renowned lines, "If music be the food of love, play on."

WI. Shakespeare's identical twins Viola and Sebastian, a girl and a boy, are all but impossible—identical twins share most, if not all, of the same DNA and therefore must be the same sex.

VII. Shakespeare is considered the greatest playwright of all time, deriving source material from classic stories, Greek and Roman plays, and actual historical events. The classic Greek plot device—twins being separated at birth—was modified in this case. The twins are separated in a shipwreck.

VIII. Today, Twelfth Night is one of the most popular of Shakespeare's 37 works. In his lifetime however, the case appears to have been quite different. There is record of only one performance during Shakespeare's lifetime—for an audience of lawyers.

Who's Who in the Cast

IX. Some familiar faces light up the stage in this classic romantic comedy. PSF's own Education Director Erin Mullen—a DeSales alumna, takes on the impish, vivacious Viola. Like her character, Erin Mullen has an alternative name, Erin Clare Hurley—her Actors Equity Association name. Previous acting credits include Charley's Aunt at PSF, Anne of Green Gables at The People's Light and Theatre

Company (Barrymore nomination), and the Cleveland Play House.

X. Carl N. Wallnau returns for his ninth season to portray Malvolio, the pompous steward to Lady Olivia. His credits with PSF include Sleuth, The Imaginary Invalid, Charley's Aunt, Richard III, Love's Labour's Lost, Romeo and Juliet, All's Well That Ends Well, Comedy of Errors, and The Taming of the Shrew.

XI. Sir Toby Belch, a hearty comedian and partying practical joker with a lust for the finer—and not-so-fine—things in life, will be played by John Ahlin, whose first performance at PSF was as Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part 1*.

XII. Last seen as Autolycus/Time in *The Winter's Tale*, Anthony Lawton makes a triumphant return as the wise fool, Feste, the role he played in PSF's production in 2000. Referred to as "the most charming of Shakespeare's fools," Feste also sings the play's beautiful closing song:

A great while ago the world begun, With a hey, ho, the wind and the rain, But that's all one, our play is done, And we'll strive to please you every day.

Victoria Fragnito, a DeSales University theatre major and work study student for PSF, provided research for this article.

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The Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Education News

On Shakespeare's birthday, April 23, PSF got a great gift. U.S. Representative Charlie Dent announced that for the second consecutive year, PSF ranks among only 40 companies nationwide awarded funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for its signature program, Shakespeare in American Communities/ Shakespeare for a New Generation.

PSF's annual Linny Fowler WillPower Tour has served almost half of Pennsylvania's 67 counties and more than 60,000 students at more than 100 schools since the tour was founded in 2000.

With the \$25,000 NEA grant, the fall 2008 tour of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* will include up to 12 new rural or inner city schools in 10 previously unserved Pennsylvania counties, with an emphasis on western and central Pennsylvania. Funding will also support busing local students to summer Shakespeare performances at the Festival.

Prior to receiving the NEA grant in 2007, taking WillPower beyond a 75-mile radius was cost-prohibitive, restricting the tour to areas within driving distance not requiring



Erin Mullen Education Director

overnight stays. The 2008 grant allows us to continue expanding WillPower's audience in underserved schools remote from PSF and other major arts organizations by supporting food, lodging, and travel expenses for the touring artists and by reducing performance fees required of the selected schools.

The NEA grant supports WillPower by connecting Shakespeare with today's students in the most enriching way possible: live performance. The feedback from the students and their teachers tells us that a live Shakespeare performance impacts learning long after the truck is packed and the actors are gone.

New Online Ticketing System Makes it Easy for Patrons

By Dael Jackson

A major investment in the PSF box office's new software ticketing program, Theatre Manager, allows patrons to choose their seats online and streamline their ticketing process, bringing the festival in line with the industry standard and customer expectations.

Under the old system, patrons ordering single tickets online had to wait until they got to the theatre to discover which seats they purchased. Now, you can see the seats online before you purchase them. Even better, if you don't like the first seats offered

when you enter your selection criteria, a new seat is just a click away.

Another significant upgrade: the box office staff can easily access patron information during a transaction. Your patron number, right above the PSF logo on the ticket, allows us to link directly to your account without having to ask a series of questions. Plus, the bar codes printed on the sides of the tickets allow us to count ticket stubs and track attendance.

So feel free to order online, and we'll see you at the theatre! ■



KING [EAR: THE "I" OF THE STORM

By Lisa Higgins

All things have their season. But Lear only wants one season: a permanent season of power.

"There are times in our lives when we must be powerful, strong, and decisive, and there are times when we need to be gentle, compassionate, and loving. But Lear learns in the most painful way possible that he cannot only be all powerful and demanding," says Fontaine Syer, who is directing PSF's production. "He is out of balance."

When he recovers his balance, his incomparable pain reveals astonishing beauty.

In Harold Bloom's landmark work, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, he writes:

Lear himself is Shakespeare's most sublime and most demanding character. Outrageously hyperbolical, insanely eloquent, Lear nevertheless always demands more love than can be given.

Lear's inability to listen to those who truly love him and who have the courage to offer counsel that defies his blind rage leads to the devastation of his family and his kingdom. His youngest daughter, Cordelia, cannot convince Lear of her genuine love, and is stripped of her dowry and banished. The Earl of Kent, Lear's loyal friend, defends Cordelia, and is also banished.

Fontaine Syer directs *King Lear* in the Schubert Theatre, July 9 through August 3.

Befitting his outsized ego, Lear decides he wants to keep 100 knights and assigns the responsibility of feeding

and caring for this large entourage to two of his daughters, Goneril and Regan, who have avidly proclaimed their love for him upon his command. "They lose their sense of balance, too, and become as awful as their father in the things they do," Syer says.

Describing *King Lear* as "an enormous mountain of a challenge" Syer recalled that "the minute Patrick (Producing Artistic Director Patrick Mulcahy) asked me to direct, I knew the only answer to the challenge was to say 'yes."

After 30 years in theatre, including artistic leadership positions at the revered Oregon Shakespeare Festival and the Delaware Theatre Company, Syer has directed and acted in many of

Shakespeare's works. While she has seen several productions of *King Lear*—at Stratford on Avon, Stratford, Canada, and last year at the Utah Shakespearean Festival—this produc-

tion is her first as director of Lear.

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Christopher Coucill, who will play King Lear, portrayed Don Quixote in PSF's 2004 production, *Man of La Mancha*.

Who's Who in King Lear

To reflect the timeless and universal quality of the play, the production has a spare, elemental set design by five-time Emmy winner Bob Phillips. The costumes, designed by Marla Jurglanis, feature sleek, elegant, classic lines. Eric Haugen is designing lighting, and Matthew Given is sound designer.

Christopher Coucill – King Lear. The aging, power-hungry King of Britain who, in

his misguided demands in old age, brings catastrophe for his family and kingdom.

David Alan Anderson – Earl of Kent. The extremely loyal nobleman of King Lear who remains dedicated to Lear, even after being banished by him. $\label{eq:Christopher Patrick Mullen} \textbf{-} \operatorname{Edgar}.$

The legitimate son of Gloucester – an enigmatic character who transforms himself to survive and, ultimately, to challenge his half-brother's atrocities.

Chris Faith – Lear's Fool. Devoted to Lear, his sarcastic songs illuminate Lear's poor decisions and their consequences.

Susan Riley Stevens – Regan. Lear's middle daughter and wife of the Duke of Cornwall will stop at nothing to secure her power and pleasure.

Rachael Joffred – Cordelia. Lear's youngest daughter, remains true to Lear despite his cruelty towards her.











Left to right: David Alan Anderson, Christopher Patrick Mullen, Chris Faith, Susan Riley Stevens and Rachael Joffred. Photos by Lee A. Butz.

Actor and Director: Lifeblood of a Production

By Julie J. Grega

Like most superstars, *Dracula*—a superstar in the literary world for more than a century—has been talked about, written about, misinterpreted, exploited, and even sanitized. People have preconceived notions about who he is, what he looks like, and how his story will end.

Leave your preconceptions at the door. Dracula: The Journal of Jonathan Harker is a fast-paced, nuanced adaptation by PSF veteran Jim Helsinger, directed and performed by two more PSF favorites: Matt Pfeiffer and Christopher Patrick Mullen, respectively.

In Helsinger's adaptation, the audience sees Dracula through the eyes of Jonathan Harker, a young solicitor who travels from the comforts of genteel Victorian London to rustic Eastern Europe to close a real estate deal with Count Dracula of Transylvania.

Says Mullen, "Harker's got this great commission, so it's nothing but excitement and a fun trip. The audience should feel like they're going along with him. It's raw—like the novel."

"The brilliance of Jim's adaptation is trusting Stoker's own view of

Dracula through the eyes of Jonathan Harker," says Pfeiffer.

"When Jim originally did this play," remembers Mullen, "he was just at a desk with papers and candles, and that was basically it, and it worked tremendously well. An audience's first impression is that the actor has no escape, nothing to hold onto, nothing to use. It also puts the audience there, and they have no escape either."

The Orlando Shakespeare Theatre's subsequent productions added more scenography, and in PSF's, the impressive set by Bob Phillips will function almost like one more fascinating character.

Dracula has received three productions at the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, where Helsinger is artistic director. Lauding the play's inventive theatricality, reviewers suggest that what is imagined is more frightening than what is seen. "We'll try to create a world where you see hints of the macabre, so you fill in the rest with your own imagination," says Pfeiffer.

In Orlando's 2003 production, Helsinger brought in Mullen to do the acting, and Mullen is enthusiastic about tackling the play a second time. "I got very turned on by the idea of doing something that's sort of in your bones, that has cooked in your mind for a few years."

That's not to say he doesn't have his work cut out for him. Mullen has been mining the novel for details and deeper insights, and he still has all those lines to re-learn. "I can't believe that I had this all memorized at one point! *That's* the horror story of *Dracula*, the lines," he joked. The reality: "The goal is to be absolutely off-book, backwards and forwards, in the first rehearsal."

Over the past few summers, audiences have applauded Mullen's ability to switch deftly from one character to another—masterfully so in *Around the World in 80 Days* in 2005 and in *The Mystery of Irma Vep* last season. Like a professional athlete, he makes it look effortless, belying the tremendous work and

"Playing multiple roles calls for different strategies as an actor than productions where you play one continued on page 7

training behind it.



King Lear, continued from page 5

Consumed by the idea of power without responsibility or benevolence, Lear loses his grasp on reality. "Lear's journey through madness teaches him humility and reminds him that human beings have vulnerabilities that cannot be denied," Syer says.

Accompanied by his Fool, Lear escapes from his daughters' mistreatment into the stormy night. "Trying to command the storm on the heath and tumbling into insanity makes him accept his place in the universe as just a man—and reminds him that humans are not all-powerful."

Lear is not the only older man with family trouble: his friend the Earl of Gloucester struggles with his two sons, Edgar, the elder, legitimate son and Edmund, an illegitimate son, whom he initially treats with some contempt. Edmund's trickery leads Gloucester to repudiate the benevolent Edgar.

Although he proclaims himself "a servant to the laws of Nature" and seduces both Regan and Goneril, "Edmund reminds us that no one is all good or all bad," says Syer.

"There are elements of all things human in each of us."

"Many readers of Shakespeare become as dangerously enthralled by Edmund as they are by Iago, yet Edgar, recalcitrant and repressed, actually is the larger enigma," writes Bloom, who considers them Shakespeare's most interesting brothers.

"After all the madness," Syer says, "Lear's great revelation is in finding Cordelia—and discovering or rediscovering that love can endure and be unconditional. Lear's joy at the reunion with Cordelia makes him feel that being in prison will be a kind of paradise—if she is with him.

"All of Shakespeare's plays are about the language," says Syer, "and that's where our emphasis is in this production. King Lear is one of the greatest plays in our language and it has something to say to everyone. Not just to older men and older women. It speaks to the broadest possible audience. It may say something different to someone who is twenty, than to someone who is fifty, or eighty. But it has something magnificent to say."

Dracula, continued from page 6

character. On the one hand, you have to be extremely precise and define each character, and on the other hand, you paint in broad strokes because you have to take on several personalities in just one evening." The complexities of a one-man, multi-character show do guarantee that, as Mullen says, "It's never boring."

Directing a one-man show isn't boring either. "When we're working in rehearsal, it's all on Chris's shoulders, so that can be fairly intense. But because it's just the two of us, it makes the work more personal and therefore relaxed," Pfeiffer says.

Although Mullen and Pfeiffer have acted together at PSF over the span of a decade in *Comedy of Errors* (1997), *Richard III, Twelfth Night* (2000), and *Charley's Aunt* (2001), this is the first time that they will work together as actor and director. Both are highly regarded theatre artists in the Philadelphia area, each receiving Barrymore nominations last year.

Says Mullen, "Matt is one of the best directors I know." High praise from an actor who has 20 years of theatre and televi-

sion credits and works so steadily, he rarely has any time off between contracts. Adds Pfeiffer, "It's hard to find a better combination of spirit and talent than Chris Mullen. I am honored and thrilled."

Mullen and Pfeiffer each have more than 20 PSF productions to their names, and both are DeSales University alumni; Mullen graduated in 1987 and Pfeiffer in 1999.

They both know The Labuda Center for the Performing Arts inside and out. "It's my home. I grew up here," shares Pfeiffer. "This is where I learned what kind of artist I wanted to be, and the family here still inspires me."

"The quality of work here is something that I'm really proud of," says Mullen. "Every year PSF is attracting better and better talent. There's a spirit of adventure [here], and there's an insistence on taking risks. At PSF, they want people to go for a ride when they sit in those seats, and that's really cool."

Hang on to your seats, and get ready for the adventure! ■

Julie J. Grega, PSF's development/marketing assistant, is a 2007 DSU theatre alumna.

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The Volunteer Guild, like the Green Show, brings smiles to PSF patrons. Photo by Lee A. Butz.

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TWELFTH NIGHT June 18 - July 6



KING LEAR July 9 - August 3



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