

Cyrano review – Northern Broadsides sniff out a winner

4/5stars

New Vic, Newcastle-under-Lyme

Christian Edwards makes an absorbing hero in this swaggering adaptation of Rostand's tale, featuring some brilliant baroque music



Young, charismatic and virile ... Christian Edwards as Cyrano. Photograph: Nobby Clark

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[Northern Broadsides](#) has built its reputation on no-nonsense productions of Shakespeare. But in recent years, the company has developed an equally impressive strand of foreign-language adaptations, created by the husband-and-wife team of writer Deborah McAndrew and director/composer Conrad Nelson.

The McAndrew-Nelson modus operandi is generally to set a European classic in the back yard of JB Priestley or *Shameless*'s Frank Gallagher: they

have transplanted Gogol's [Government Inspector](#) to a West Riding council chamber and Nikolai Erdman's [The Suicide](#) to a sink estate. Its version of Edmond Rostand's verse drama remains firmly where Rostand set it, however, among a mid-17th-century Parisian milieu of musketeers, cardinals and poetry-loving pastry cooks.



Nose for the unexpected ... Christian Edwards as Cyrano and Sharon Singh as Roxane in *Cyrano*. Photograph: Nobby Clark

In other respects, McAndrew's adaptation embodies the company's manifesto, by making it abundantly clear that, as leader of the Gascon cadets, Cyrano is an outsider, whose eloquence is delivered in a regional accent: "Shall I hide my roots and change my voice / Modulate my vowels to fit in? / Evacuate my bowels of the knowledge that creativity is not the sole preserve of privilege? / Deny that there are just as many artists in the ranks? No thanks."

Christian Edwards's Cyrano is a combative provincial who seems to be as much imbalanced by the chip on his shoulder as the nose on his face. But he is young, charismatic and virile, which creates an absorbing sense that the character's deep insecurity is as much psychological as physiological. Adam Barlow's rapidly handsome Christian is the opposite side of the coin: having resolved to seduce Sharon Singh's radiant Roxane in his own words, the best he can come up with is: "I want to nibble your neck. Well, it's alliteration, isn't it?"



Regal uplift ... the cast of Cyrano. Photograph: Nobby Clark

Elsewhere, the alterations to Rostand are subtle, but arguably an improvement on the original. The valuable role of the drunkard poet Ligniere, who Rostand rather profligately dispenses with after the first act, is expanded into a recurrent, choric figure, raffishly played by Michael Hugo. Francesca Mills gives an eye-catching performance as an artfully concealed pickpocket and Paul Barnhill provides a compassionate sense of frustrated ambition as the master baker and mediocre wordsmith Ragueneau.

But it is the brilliant, baroque flourishes of Nelson's music that give the production a regal sense of uplift, as well as solving some awkward dramatic longueurs. The bizarre scene in which Cyrano stalls for time by pretending to have tumbled from the moon becomes a splendidly surreal cabaret number listing the signs of the zodiac. Later, the ennui of the siege of Arras is conveyed by an exquisite ballad that is part-Lully, part-lullaby. It's a production which supplies all the required braggadocio and swagger, but nonetheless displays a nose for the unexpected.

- At [New Vic, Newcastle-under-Lyme](#), until 25 February.

Box office: 01782 717 962.