

Cyrano (2021)



Cyrano & Christian become acquainted in their barracks. (c) United Artists Releasing

I have loved this story ever since as a boy I saw Jose Ferrer's Oscar-winning performance in the 1950 version of the story of this cavalier with a nose bigger than Jimmy Durante's or Bob Hope's. This re-imagined version, with the handicap of a small body substituted for the big proboscis, is worthy of comparison to that version, as well as the wonderful 1990 French release starring Gérard Depardieu. How intriguing that screenwriter Erica Schmidt could imagine her own husband Peter Dinklage as a stand-in for those earlier, taller actors! I have loved this little actor with a big talent ever since seeing him in the delightful 2003 film [Station Agent](#), and so am very happy to see him take a leading romantic role that gives him the opportunity to show us how talented an actor he is! Hers and his success in their off Broadway (she directed it) apparently was great enough to garner the backing for this film version of the musical.

In this version the film begins with the penniless orphaned Roxanne going to the opera with the foppish Duke De Guiche—his face is so covered with powder and rouge that he looks like a painted puppet. The Duke is determined to marry her, but Roxanne states her desire to marry for love. While taking her seat, she and newly recruited soldier Christian de Neuvillette see each other and are immediately smitten by love.

As the play begins the unfortunate lead actor is shouted down by someone in the audience. Decrying his incompetence, Cyrano chases the man off the stage, and then is challenged by a man who foolishly insults the little man. In their sword contest, Cyrano bests him at every move, and would have let him leave alive if not the ignorant oaf had tried to kill his opponent while he was off guard.

The rest of the film follows the familiar plot line of the swordsman/poet agreeing to become the link between his beloved and the new soldier. Cyrano and Roxanne ([Haley Bennett](#)) have been friends since childhood. so he is frequently with her. At the same time Cyrano loves the woman whom he beguiles into desiring to marry the man whom she thinks has written the series of cherished letters. Gifted in words and swordsmanship, Cyrano is nonetheless deeply insecure, the many insults thrown at him eroding his soul. We see this when he confesses to his best friend Le Bret (Bashir Salahuddin), "My sole purpose on this earth is to love Roxanne," and his friend enquires, "Does she know?" [Cyrano](#) says, "The world will never accept someone like me and a tall, beautiful woman."

Even while Cyrano and Christian go off to war and are on the frontlines of battle, Cyrano, unknown to his friend, writes a letter to his beloved every single day. The moment of truth, when Christian eventually discovers that Cyrano also is deeply in love with Roxanne, is a powerful one, and also revelatory of both of their hearts. The twin tragedies that follow demonstrate why this romantic tale is one of the most affecting stories in literature, including the teenage romance of *Romeo and Juliette*.

The film's songs do not pop out and burn themselves into your memory, but they do add poetry to the play and enhance greatly the drama. For instance, there's the lovely "Someone to Say" in the exchange between the inarticulate Christian and the poet Cyrano that the former sings. The director films Cyrano and Christian sitting on the ground in the barracks, with

Christian pouring out his heart to his new friend. As the camera pans slightly to their left we see the soldiers practicing their swordsmanship, using wooden sticks. Choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui has Christian arise and dance through the rows of soldiers underneath archways, eventually joining in a dance with a group of soldiers in a far room. It is a marvelously fluid take, one of many that the director orders up from his cinemaphotographer Seamus McGarvey. The filmmakers also make good use of the village in Sicily where the films is shot.

Cyrano's love for Roxanne that it transcends the romantic, verging deeply into the territory of what is known in the New Testament as agape. Read the various translations of 1 Corinthians 13, and you will see that it describes well Cyrano's love. He does not seek to *possess*. Believing in his own unworthiness, he wishes her to be happy and is willing to lay aside his own desires in a mistaken plan to help her fulfill her desire.

We also see the power of words, something deep intrinsic in the Bible, to contain the essence of the soul. Roxanne's eyes are blinded by subterfuge of the men, but it is the truth and beauty of the words that have won her heart, and when she at last learns who penned those words, she instantly puts away her fantasy built on appearances.

Had I seen this film in time, it would have been on my Top 10 Films list for 2021. Do not miss it, once it becomes more available. It's well worth the trouble of donning a mask and traveling to your local theater.

For an informative short video on this actor see "[The Essential Guide to Peter Dinklage](#)" on IMDb.

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