

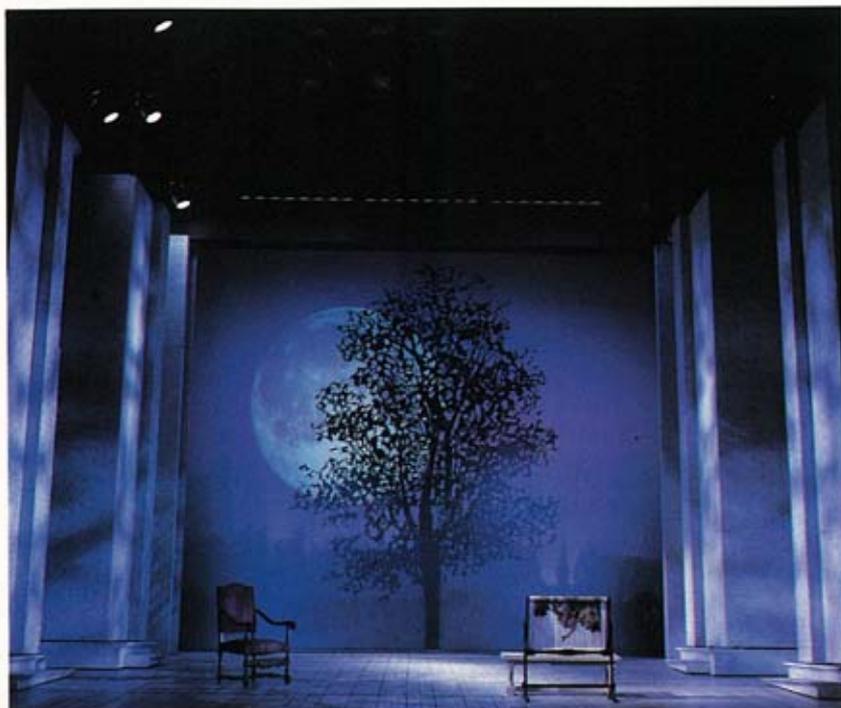
CYRANO DE BERGERAC

David Taylor interviews lighting designer David Hersey on the set of the latest West End production

We mere mortals often look towards the world's leading lighting designers and offer up thanks for the titbits that filter down to us through the system - the new gel colour, the custom gobo, the Vari*Lite, the Digital Light Curtain; all developed on the back of the big budget musical, rock spectacular or chunky industrial and now available at a hire store nearby to enable us to do our job a little easier.

But David Hersey, whilst offering more new ideas and development of lighting technology during his epic career than most of the rest put together, has given us something else - over the last half decade he has created a new economy of lighting, a designed rig with just enough equipment to perfectly create the world he sees in his head. No frills, no bells and whistles just for the sake of it; just imagination with a beautiful small 'i'.

Cyrano de Bergerac opened at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket in December 1992, directed by Elijah Moshinsky with designs by Yale's stage design professor Michael Yeargan. The programme is the normal understated slate blue-covered fare for the Haymarket, but open it up, and, like the production, it glistens with a magic and charm that belies its 'straight play'



The moon is a full frame 18cm slide projected by a Pani BP2 with an 18cm lens. The moon shafts on stage are provided by Vari-Lite VL5s. Photos: Wyatt Enever

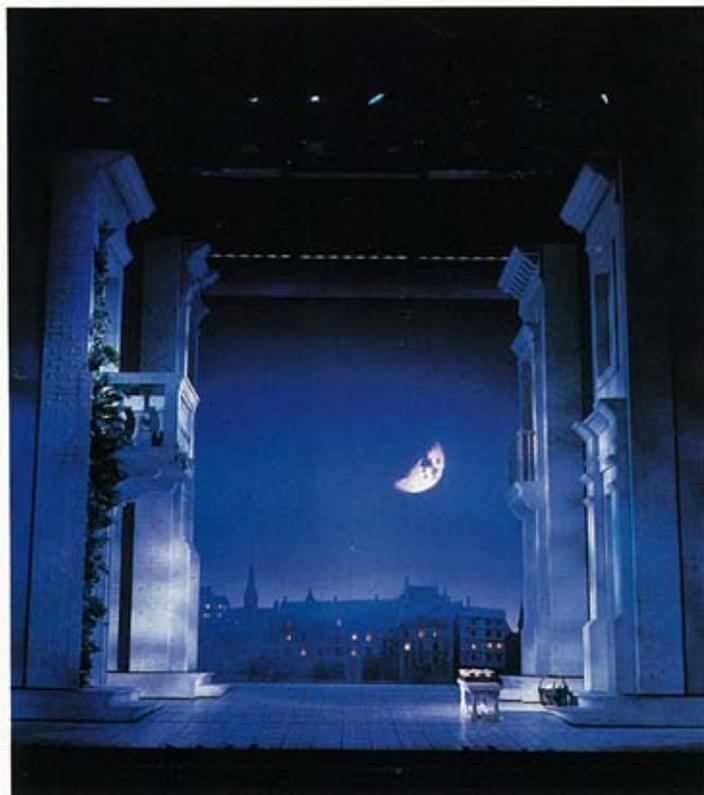
appearance. Cyrano looks like a big budget musical. It sounds like a Lucas film. It feels like you're there and it is a great story. John Wells has adapted the play by Rostand which tells of the big-nosed dueller and his un-requited love for the beautiful Roxanne (played by House of Elliott's Stella Gonet), who helps a young Gascon guard to win her love by writing his love letters and even impersonating the

astonishing thing to do in the West End and so the constraints became challenges.

He began work six weeks before the opening, aware that it was to be a highly visual production. "The team realised that the lighting was very important," said Hersey (in typical understatement), "but the hanging was quite tight." The set comprised some very large revolving towers, a number of huge flown

tongue-tied youth beneath Roxanne's moonlit balcony. The story has been told and filmed many times before, but this production is the most accessible and engaging, with Robert Lindsay as the large-proboscised one in superb swash-buckling mode. Hersey has worked with Elijah Moshinsky before on the Royal Opera House's Peter Grimes and with Michael Yeargan on Umbrellas of Cherbourg at the Phoenix Theatre. "I find it difficult to talk about lighting adequately, but I had a common vocabulary with these guys from previous work," explained Hersey.

The job arrived with a phone call and Hersey "as it was a great play and a beautiful theatre" launched straight in. The model was rough-designed already, but he felt that it was an



For the Balcony Scene (above left), a three dimensional ground row is used in front of a twin white back projection screen. The black sharktooth gauze is 'clouded' by the upstage Digital Light Curtains. There are cobblestone gobos on the deck and break-ups on the towers, and the actors, when on stage, are lit by a combination of VL5s and R&V beam lights. Cobblestone gobos as used in the Street Scene (above right).

pieces and a full size back-projection cyclorama with three-dimensional groundrow of the Paris skyline.

"I chose to light the show with Vari*Lite VL5s and DLCs (DHA Digital Light Curtains) very early on in the production development, because I knew I wouldn't be able to find the space for all the equipment I needed for the changes. The VL5s went in on the original plot and didn't move - although it took some effort to convince Elijah that I should have them on the proscenium booms."

The lighting design is remarkably simple - five on-stage lighting bars, supplemented with three hung ladders per side, well-filled perch positions and three bars upstage of the back-projection screen. Out front it is almost bare, with the two proscenium booms, a goal-post each side of the house and some lonely T-Spots on the front of the dress circle. The VL5s sit quietly and discreetly on the booms but provide a superb cross-light that is used throughout the show.

"They gave me my pocket of low cross-light," enthused Hersey, "and the whole show was built around it. Michael had given me a crack to get through at the proscenium so I lost the shadows. Originally I wanted to put some follow spots on the goal-posts but budget and the beauty of the Vari*Lite persuaded me otherwise."

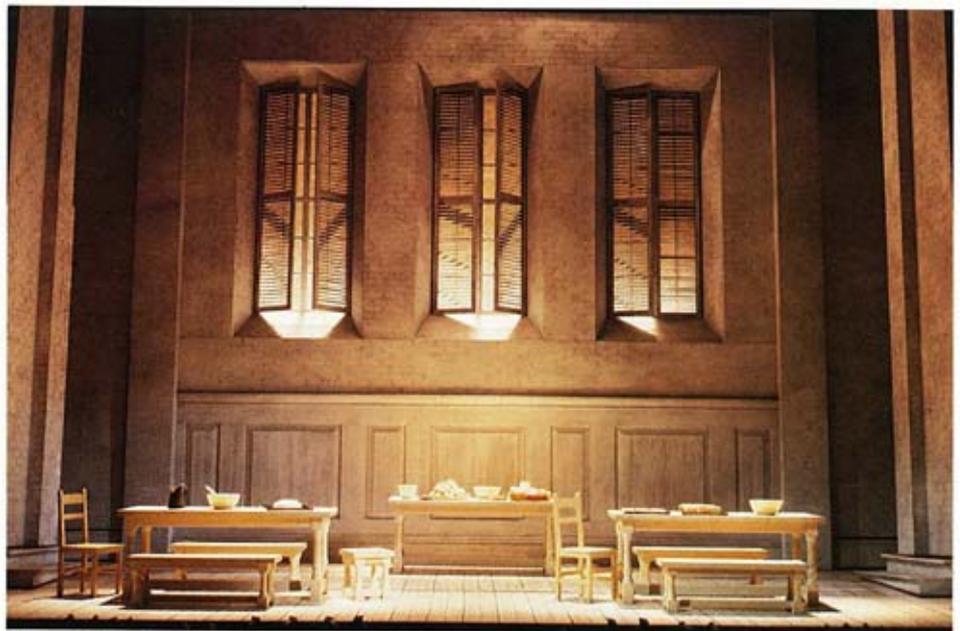
I sat through the show desperately trying to see the damn things move. But time after time they gently eased into a scene in a new colour without my seeing the wiggle. "The VL5s are silent . . . really," said Hersey. "I'd auditioned them a little while before beginning the show and they really did offer an opportunity for economy and accuracy. For this straight play the silence was important and they were bright enough for what I wanted to do. They are nominally equivalent to a Parcan and a scroller, but I could easily shift them into exactly the area I wanted, so the design became simpler and crisper."

All the VL5s had #2 lenses which performed exactly as Hersey wanted. "The #1 lens is very messy and the others are far too washy for what I wanted to achieve." The design thus evolved with a stunning European look of broad colour wash (helped by the beautiful cyc at the rear) with white or off-white soft edged beams keyed into it. The side light was the last element touched into the cues.

Hersey sat in on the last few rehearsals, mindful of the areas into which the Vari*Lite had been defined by the set. Four VL5s on the fifth electrics bar gave Hersey his legendary three-quarter backlight, freshening the actors from the expanse of the infinite cyclorama. "I was broadly clear about what the kit would achieve and I developed a hand-written cue synopsis in the rehearsals that paid attention to the likely positions of the moving equipment."

Asked about the colour accuracy of the VL5s Hersey reported that delicate tints were tricky. "The tungsten lamp in the VL5 is great but of course its colour temperature is down to 3200K. I needed 201 in the show and the only way to really get it with a VL5 is to put a piece of 201 in front of the luminaire. Sometimes the dichroic colour mix was a bit sluggish but we did manage to match the Vari*Lite to the DLC colours." There are a few live colour changes from the VL5s and Hersey wanted more, but he did not like the colours the mix went through getting there.

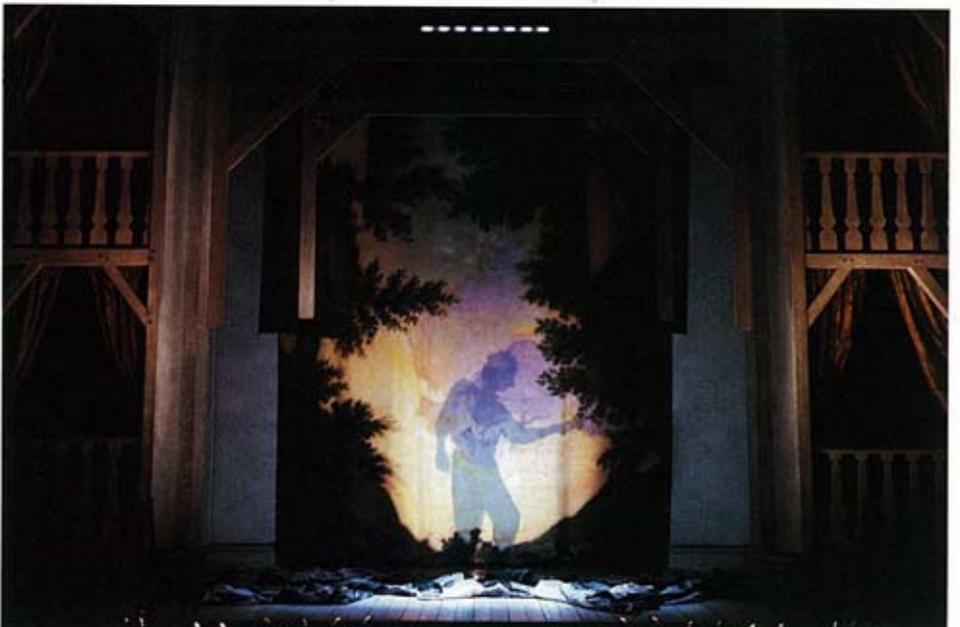
Moshinsky's version of the play comprises five acts taking the audience from a performance at the theatre de Bourgogne in 1640, through the Bakery of the Poets to



The windows for the Bakery Scene are lit by a combination of the US Digital Light Curtain and four VL5s. The tables are keyed with the DS Digital Light Curtain, with one section positioned on each table.



The Theatre Scene after Cyrano has pulled down most of the cloths.



The stage after Cyrano has trashed it. The shadow is from a 2K fresnel sans lens. The colour of the shadow is achieved with a Digital Light Curtain.

KEY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260	261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280	281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300	301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310	311	312	313	314	315	316	317	318	319	320	321	322	323	324	325	326	327	328	329	330	331	332	333	334	335	336	337	338	339	340	341	342	343	344	345	346	347	348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356	357	358	359	360	361	362	363	364	365	366	367	368	369	370	371	372	373	374	375	376	377	378	379	380	381	382	383	384	385	386	387	388	389	390	391	392	393	394	395	396	397	398	399	400	401	402	403	404	405	406	407	408	409	410	411	412	413	414	415	416	417	418	419	420	421	422	423	424	425	426	427	428	429	430	431	432	433	434	435	436	437	438	439	440	441	442	443	444	445	446	447	448	449	450	451	452	453	454	455	456	457	458	459	460	461	462	463	464	465	466	467	468	469	470	471	472	473	474	475	476	477	478	479	480	481	482	483	484	485	486	487	488	489	490	491	492	493	494	495	496	497	498	499	500																																																																																																		
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SCENE/STAGEWORK	GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
170	171	172	173	
185	186	188		

THEATRE FLATS	STAIRS	BRICKS
175	176	178
176	179	
177	180	

SCROLLS	HOUSE LIGHTS
220	221
222	223
224	225
226	227
227	228
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A view of the control desk which for the first time in Haymarket history has actually made it to a front of house position in the corner of the balcony. The Macintosh runs 'Light Talk' for the six Digital Light Curtains, whilst the Mini-Artisan controls the 18 VL5s.



A burnt out house with light shafts through what is left of the roof.

exquisitely intimate square in Old Marais where Roxanne offers her first kiss to Christian de Neuvillette from her ivy-strewn balcony. After the interval, uplifted by the optimism of the first half and, of course, a visit to the bar, we are brought down to earth with a bump with the horror of war vividly portrayed at the Siege of Arras. A violent battle in which Christian is killed dissolves into a unique passage of time sequence, with the stage actorless, moving us forward to the calm and solitude of a Parisian Convent 15 years later where Roxanne awaits her daily visit from Cyrano.

The opening of the show is a triumph of dynamic stage lighting. With no clear break between preset and the beginning of the play the warmth of the theatre houselights is supplemented by a gentle glow of amber from the boom VL5s washing onto the auditorium box fronts and a hanging chandelier complete with wiggly candle flickers on five dimmer circuits hanging low in the auditorium. Hersey is very fond of his 'Advance Bar' sitting on the floor at the front of the stage. "Originally I had only four Birdies at the side of the stage, but after I realised the sightlines were not impaired it just grew and grew.

I loved the 'period' look it gave me for the theatre scene." The on-stage theatre boxes are lit from this position as well as the auditorium boxes and Cyrano's first entrance from within the auditorium is when he swings down on a curtain pull onto the stage. "It gave me faces hanging in space and was so neat and tidy," enthused Hersey.

Similarly, the specific moments of the play that needed 'highlight' were handled by Reich and Vogel Beamlights tucked away on the booms and goalposts as well as overhead. "They have a sexy quality of light which is thick - you can reach out and hold it in your hand."

The Vari*Lite work hard in this show to give a subtle, but crisp key light in conjunction with the colour washes provided by the six ADB 2K fresnels and the six DHA DLCs. Those converted to the DLC philosophy find it easy to see how neatly the blocks of light thrown from the 12 volt VN5P Par 56 lamps, tinted by a choice of up to 20 colours, and able to tilt to any position on-stage, can be integrated into the base of a clear-stage lighting design.

Here, they excel, providing punchy backlight for the opening theatre scene, superbly uplifting sunlight through the three towering windows of the bakery (whilst three more DLCs align perfectly with the floor-covered tables inside), or performing solo during the time dissolve sequence before the

last act.

Both the DLCs and the Vari*Lite were plotted by Vari*Lite designer Nick Moran. Hersey used a Mini-Artisan for the VL5s and a Mac running LightMoves for the DLCs. "We all sat together in the stalls to plot," remembers Hersey, "but Triumph were eventually convinced to allow us to take out two seats in the gods to get the running console into the space."

The board op monitors the Mac and Artisan in performance but all are run from the house Gemini console. The VL5 levels are run from the Gemini, whilst the colour changes and focus moves are run from the Mini-Artisan.

Two 5kW fresnels hang on the eighth electric to handle the backlight, both with Rainbow colour scrollers. "I wanted to do in-view colour moves with the 5K scrollers," said Hersey, "but the output from the Gemini just wasn't up to it - too much stepping for my liking." In-view colour fades do, however figure prominently in the design of the show.

The final scene, and Cyrano's death are played out in the convent garden overshadowed with a huge tree. Hersey cut custom 'leafy breakups' gobos to the exact shape of the tree. Deployed in four 2kW Silhouette 15s with Rainbows on their snouts these gobos provide an emotive actor in the final act. The scroll strings comprise a run from Rosco 03 Dark Bastard Amber through Lee 202 and 201 colour temperature blue to the more saturated blues of Rosco 68 Sky Blue and Rosco 85 Deep Blue.

"I'm very excited by in-view colour shifts," said Hersey. "I'd begun to use them in Miss Saigon, but I'm exploring the potential of the very slow live colour temperature change." In Cyrano it is this subtle, almost sublime temperature change that raises the trembling lump in the audience's throat.

The simple brush strokes shift the drama into a higher emotional gear and the inherent reality of what Hersey is doing on the stage cannot help but suck the audience into the world of the play.

The leitmotiv of the play is the heavy moon which hangs hauntingly behind the action. Originally Hersey wanted a tracking projection, but he gradually grew to believe that it was the image that was important, not its performance. The moons that subtly perform are achieved by glass gobos in Silhouette 15s and an 18cm slide in a Pani BP2 with 18cm lens. "We did the calculations back in the office to get the image size fully expecting to have to revise it (you can do that when you own

the company that makes the gobos!). But when we got into the theatre it was bang on."

There is a superb synergy between Hersey and sound designer Paul Arditti whose immaculate soundscape punctuates and underscores the whole action. "I worked closely with Paul. He's awfully good and, of course, is a 'Macophile', like me!"

Hersey is never far from his Macintosh computer. Yeagan's designs for the show were worked on Autocad by Modelbox. Hersey received the plans in DXF format and transferred first to Minicad then to PowerDraw version 3.0 on which he draws his lighting plots at 1:50 scale. Daily draft plots were provided for the team, as well as full size rigging maps supplemented by the normal Hersey bookful of paperwork prepared on his database, Filemaker Pro.

"The young crews you get nowadays are so data literate now," said Hersey. "They all have computers and thus aren't frightened by the paperwork." Bill Wardroper was the production electrician for the show, and although Hersey unusually did not have an assistant, Wardroper provided a lot of the services normally attributed to a Hersey scribe.

"We had a couple of late nights but it was mostly clean days. This is the beauty of moving lights and pre-planning just like when we first had memory boards. We focused most of the 'generic' lighting," said Hersey in his rock and roll accent, "in a zoned manner, keeping the focus as simple as possible. The set provided a natural grid and we used that to help us with tracking the Vari*Lite moves."

"I like applying musical techniques to drama," summed up Hersey. "I treated it like an opera which is what it deserved. There are loads of cues, lots of links and inserts. I enjoyed the ingredients as well as the whole mix. I took a big look and broke it down."

This attention to detail is obvious in the beauty of the design. The details are the elements that other lighting designers can enjoy and analyse, taking them away to develop in their own style. Hersey thus continues to add to the quality and wealth of world lighting design that emanates from this country.

Cyrano de Bergerac

Theatre Royal ~ Haymarket

Directed by Elijah Moshinsky

Designed by Michael Yeagan

Lighting: David Hersey

Sound: Paul Arditti

*Vari*Lite Programming: Nick Moran*

Production electrician: Bill Wardroper

LIGHTING+SOUND

International



CYRANO DE BERGERAC AT THE HAYMARKET

PHOTO: WYATT ENEVER

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- Cerritos: Theatre Projects Consultants in southern California
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- Going 'Live' at Madame Tussauds' Rock Circus

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