

DORCHESTER FILM SOCIETY
2022/23 SEASON



CYRANO
(Language: English)

Director: Joe Wright. 2022. Running time: 123 minutes.
Presented by Dorchester Film Society, 11th January, 2023.

“The phrase “handsomely made” feels like it was coined specifically to describe Joe Wright’s film-making. His period pieces and literary adaptations have ranged in quality, but you can never deny their efficacy.

At their best (*Atonement*), they are rousingly beautiful and elegantly crafted, and *Cyrano* is no exception. But they also often lack a certain staying power, and unfortunately, *Cyrano* is no exception there, either.

Wright continues his fascination with classy retellings of classic material (*Anna Karenina*, *Pride and Prejudice*) with his reimagining of Edmond Rostand’s 1897 play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Cyrano* (Peter Dinklage) is a 17th-century maverick with a talent for penmanship and poetry, pining for his unrequited love since childhood, Roxanne (a rosy-cheeked Haley Bennett).

For all his knowledge and charm, *Cyrano* has one physical defect which he feels precludes him from finding love, and results in him writing love letters to Roxanne under the guise of another young man (Christian, played by an underused Kelvin Harrison Jr) who has caught her eye: a very protuberant nose. Or at least he does in the original. For Wright makes a few major changes to this otherwise faithful story.

First of all: this is a musical. Adapted by Erica Schmidt (Dinklage’s real-life partner) from her own stage version, this is Wright’s first attempt at the genre. He has said he isn’t a particular fan of musicals, and it shows: the numbers focus on low-ley emotion rather than any clever choreography or sing-to-the-rafters climaxes.

The other major change is the disappearance of *Cyrano*’s classically large nose. Wright instead focuses on Dinklage’s dwarfism as the source of his insecurity with women. The so-called “defect” is not the issue so much as the essential feeling of being unlovable, and so the timelessness of the *Cyrano* tale remains intact – even updated – in a rather likeable way.

Perhaps because of this more organic change, one of the very best things in *Cyrano* is Dinklage's performance: he is authentic and baleful, a charmer and a melancholic, with a chance to really shine as a musical-romantic lead. There's a real potency to Dinklage's screen appeal given the removal of any silly fake nose; it was a wise choice on Wright's part to lean into reality.

There are some flat stretches and underwhelming showpieces – not so much in their writing or execution but in their navel-gazing lack of momentum. Written by indie band “The National” and performed by the actors, there is nothing wrong with the music as such, more that it has a stultifying feel on the big screen.

Yet Dinklage carries the film on his charisma, and Wright's talent for setting the scene helps: an appealing courtly backdrop filmed in sun-blasted Sicilian climes stands in for the historical setting, and the sumptuous costuming is paralleled by Wright's crisp, classical framing of images.

Cyrano may not last long in the memory, but it is an enjoyable venture – largely due to the continued emergence of Dinklage as one of cinema's most fascinating actors.”

Christina Newland, *i*, 24th February, 2022.

“It says something about the moments of love-and-death commitment in *Cyrano* that though I'm temperamentally of the latter camp, I remain moved.”

Michael Atkinson, *Los Angeles Times*, March 29th, 2022.

“Essentially, we have an innovative and clever but slightly imperfect idea from screenwriter Erica Schmidt, properly developed and expanded upon by talented director Joe Wright, and finally brought fully to life by its lead actor's moving performance.”

Monica Reid, *Far Out Magazine*, March 25th, 2022.