

See how the iconic Three Musketeers handle 1941 France



Morgan Hrymack (second photo) || Ella Wolff (front row), Sandy Borrero, Lily O'Neil, Cipa Frost (first photo).

PHOTO BY MATT AIS LUNDBLAD

by Ayyan Tamjeed
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
art24001@uconn.edu

The Nafe Katter Theatre debuted the opening show “Three Musketeers: 1941,” written by Megan Monaghan Rivas, the artistic director of the Connecticut Repertory Theatre on Sunday, March 8.

In a gender-swapped adaptation of the iconic Alexandre Dumas novel of the same name, Rivas, show director and managing director of CRT Michelle Polgar and a brilliant cast perform an exciting story about a community of women and girls fighting the Nazi regime in occupied Paris, set in the year 1941.

The play started with the introduction of country bumpkin D’Artagnan (Akur) arriving to occupied Paris to meet with a cell of free French resistance fighters.

The leader of the cell is Madam Treville (Sandy Borrero), who was a classics teacher before the war and now leads a small group of women in resisting the Nazis. In her cell resides Athos (Cipa Frost), Porthos (Lily Rae O’Neil), Aramis (Ella Wolff) and Planchet (Jimena Rivera Martínez).

The first act starts off light, as everyone in the resistance cell introduces themselves to D’Artagnan and begins plotting a plan to help a British spy escape France. It picks up after Milady (Morgan Hrymack), a British spy who works for the Nazis, infiltrates the resistance cell and finds out their plot to help another British spy escape back to the United Kingdom.

This culminates in Madam Treville and Athos being arrested by the French police after they find a gun in Treville’s bag. At the police station, the main commander Richelieu (Chris Martin) and his protégé Rochefort (Mark Sadowski) start interrogating and torturing both women to get answers.

Fortunately for the resistance fighters, the British spy escaped. Unfortunately, Richelieu retaliated by executing 20 hostages, one of them being Madam Treville.

The final scene of the first act is a heartbreaker, as Treville and others start singing what I assume is the French anthem “La Marseillaise,” before a police officer marches Treville off to her death.

After a 15-minute intermission, the second act begins with the five women in Treville’s cell grieving the death of their leader and mentor, with some of them questioning their decision to join the resistance.

But after hashing things out, they find their resolve to keep fighting the Nazi regime, and they hatch a plan to blow up the train tracks in Paris’s central depot, so Richelieu doesn’t deport 10,000 — later 20,000 — Jewish people to their likely deaths.

Even though Milady and Rochefort apprehended them at their headquarters in Treville’s school — with some excellent fight choreography — the five women managed to successfully blow up the train tracks, leaving Milady in the rubble and saving over 14,000 Jewish people from certain death in concentration camps.

In the final scene of the play, D’Artagnan, caught up in the euphoria of what her and her friends accomplished, starts wondering if more people would join the fight against the Nazis, asking “Imagine what 500 of us, or 5,000 of us could do?”

After 10 minutes, Rivas and some of the cast members came back for a quick talkback session, where they answered questions from audience members who stayed after the performance’s conclusion.

One audience member, drawing parallels from the politics of 1941 France to present day, asked the panel if one should bring their politics to the stage or keep those two worlds separate. Polgar, who held the microphone after the audience member was finished, said “Yes!”

Rivera Martínez said that “all art is inherently political, and anyone who says

no is lying to you in the face.”

Hrymack expressed her distaste at playing a villainous character in Milady but said that these people should be presented in theatre, so people know what they’re dealing with.

“I’m playing a character who I don’t share similar views with; she’s a terrible human being, a manipulator and narcissist and everything all in one,” Hrymack said. “People with these beliefs need to be shown so we know how to catch them, and we know what they look like.”

When asked where the inspiration to make a Three Musketeers adaptation in 1941 occupied Paris centered on a group of women came about, Rivas said that after making a previous “Three Musketeers” adaptation that played much closer to the source material, she was looking to create something that embodied the heart of the novel.

“What I found non-negotiable about ‘Three Musketeers’ is you had to have a group of close friends with different talents that reinforce one another, who were fighting physically for a morally admirable cause,” Rivas said.

Rivas also shared an anecdote of her receiving a family heirloom from a friend; a journal of her friend’s great-aunt who was a

nurse who served in France at the time.

Rivas remarked at passages in the journal which noted that the cities were filled with mostly women, as Frenchmen were either in labor camps or in hiding in the mountains to dodge labor camps. As she read more into this time period, she realized that women did most of the resistance work in occupied France.

“Much of the activity that we know as the French resistance was enacted and organized by girls and women. That led me into this setting for this adaptation,” Rivas said.

An audience member asked how the panel balanced the play between showing the struggles of the Free French and showing glimpsers of hope. Rivera Martínez discussed how the sense of impending doom hanging over the character’s heads drew her to this play.

“One of the reasons why I was like ‘Oh, I want to be on this show’ was despite that doom dangling over the characters head, they choose to keep going knowing that they at any point might be arrested or they might be disappeared at any moment,” Rivera Martínez said.

This sentiment was also shared by Rivas, who said “I hope that by ending with that shared view of the 500 or the 5,000 we come out of this feeling like we’re part of the 500 and numbered among the 5,000.”

“Three Musketeers: 1941” will continue showing until March 14. Tickets can be purchased through connecticutrep.uconn.edu.

