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Nose Job
 A normal-schnozzed Cyrano update is nothing to sneeze at

by Alexis Soloski
 November 8th, 2005 4:03 PM

With rhinoplasty now the most popular cosmetic procedure for men, a modern-day Cyrano de Bergerac needn't suffer so. Cavaliers with carnival schnozzes can fork over a few grand, spend a week black-eyed and bandaged, and then start delivering love letters to their Roxanes in person. But while plastic surgery continues to improve dramatically, the field still can't offer patients the prospect of deracination (a certain Mr. Jackson excepted).

So what's Korean American schoolteacher Travis Lee to do? He can charm and champion new-girl-in-town Veronica Lee, but he can't change himself into a white guy—and that's the only kind she dates. When Caucasian cowboy Del asks for some wooing advice, Travis sends sweet missives to Veronica, with Del's signature at the bottom. Michael Golamco's Wyoming-set revamp of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* is the first play in a proposed series by the National Asian American Theatre Company featuring Asian American playwrights reworking the Western canon.

As an inaugural effort, Golamco's script is a decided success. Golamco borrows the concept of Rostand's original, but dispenses with subplots, meta-theatrical devices, and even the much celebrated balcony scene in favor of his own voice and concerns. Neither a cautious update of *Cyrano* nor an earnest meditation on Asian American identity, the play instead offers a gentle, genial, and frequently rather wise comedy of character and race. If substituting attractive Asian features for an outrageously outsize snout seems a troubling trade-off, Golamco actually uses the premise to nose out questions of appearance and assimilation.

Set in the town of Breakneck, Wyoming, the play unfolds with the advent of Veronica Lee (Hana Moon) from Flushing, Queens. English teacher Travis (the dreamy Joel de la Fuente) keenly awaits her arrival, as does Chester (C.S. Lee), the town's only other Asian American resident. Chester, an adoptee whose new parents neglected to ask which country in Asia he hailed from, takes a pitifully militant approach to his identity and anticipates this "hopefully lovely Korean sister" tongue ahang. But it's Del (Timothy Davis), a taciturn hunk of cowboy,



Samurai lovers Moon and de la Fuente
 photo: Ching Gonzalez

Cowboy v. Samurai
 By Michael Golamco
 Rattlestick Playwrights Theater
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who catches Veronica's eye.

If the setup's achingly conventional (girl meets boy, girl takes up with jerk instead, girl falls for boy in the end), the dialogue and characters aren't. Golanco is kind to his characters, even Chester, and generous with endearing traits (a collection of unscratched lotto tickets, a ninja outfit) and amiable repartee. "You're an English teacher," Del pleads with Travis. "Your job is to put words together." "No," Travis corrects, "my job is to give kids books so they can draw penises in the margins." Certainly Golanco's script deserves better treatment than Travis's textbooks, and fortunately director Lloyd Suh and his fine cast provide it. Yee-haws all around.

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