

The Legend of Zorro is Born Again!

The Masked Musical

BY
Robert W. Cabell

STARRING

Roberto Blades Deborah Gibson Ruben Gomez

Kaye Ballard Dan Conroy Michael DeVries Tito Enriquez
Robert Evan Lynn Halverson Marc Kudisch Jodie Langel
Jeff McCarthy Sean McDermott Phyllis Newman Christiane Noll

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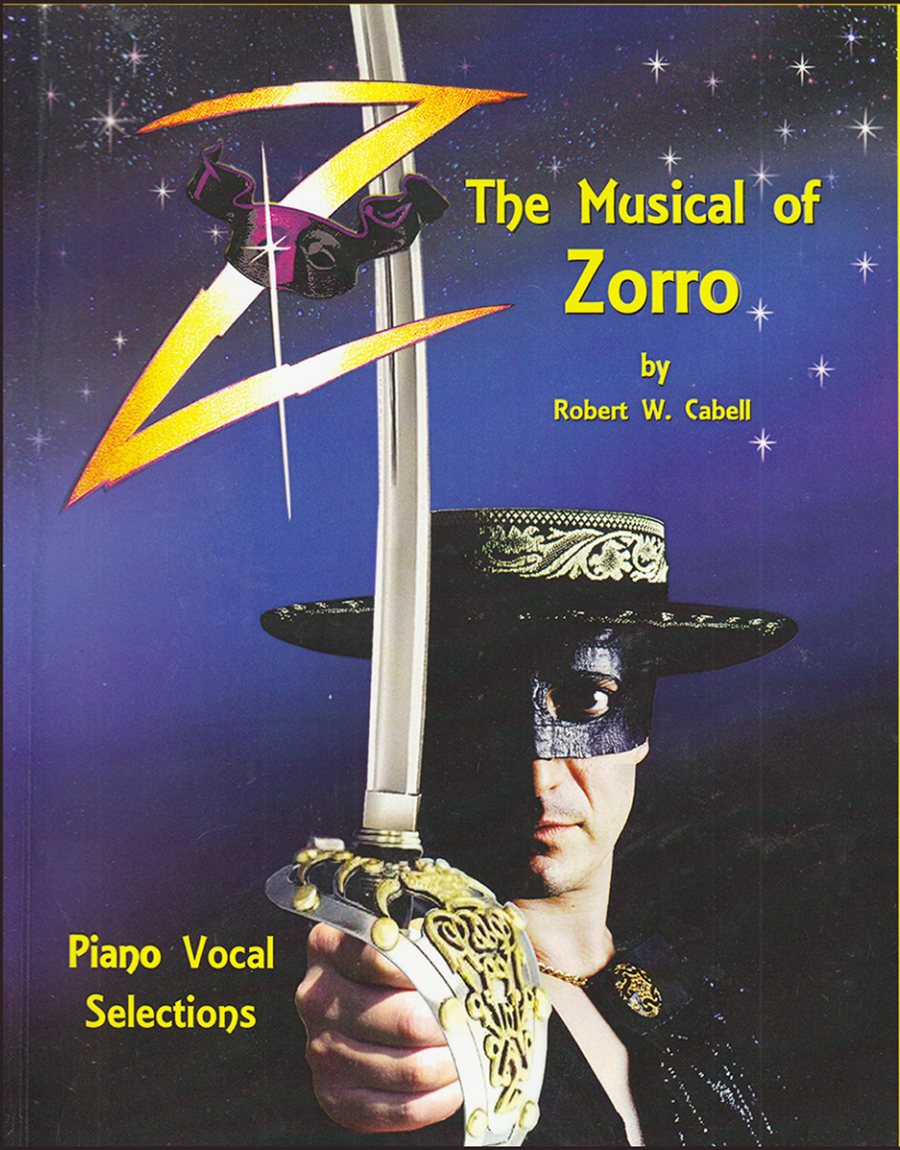
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Z: THE MASKED MUSICAL IS INSPIRED BY THE CHARACTER OF ZORRO IN THE CURSE OF CAPISTRANO BY JOHNSTON McCULLLEY

A PRODUCTION OF Get Z'd LLC



Piano Vocal
Selections



The Register-Guard
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Arts & Books

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FAMILY FORTUNE
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The decision to open a Zorro musical in Eugene has been a double-edged sword for the play's principals

By FRED CRAFTS
PHOTO BY WAYNE EASTBURN
The Register-Guard

DEEP INTO REHEARSAL of the first act of the new "Z: The Masked Musical" at South Eugene High School, playwright Robert Cabell of New York City and director Joe Zingo of Actors Cabaret of Eugene are sitting side by side in the center of the auditorium. Whispering and gesturing, they look like two islands jutting out of a red velvet sea. Three weeks away from the world premiere of the Zorro-inspired musical, Cabell has come to see, for the first time, what his fledgling Broadway-bound project actually looks like, now that the set is partially constructed and the actors are somewhat familiar with their blocking and have their lines memorized. Cabell and Zingo keep up a running commentary throughout the rehearsal, citing what looks good,

praising certain actors, criticizing passages that don't work. Their rejoinders are sharp, stinging, laudatory and insightful. Old friends, Zingo and Cabell aren't afraid to speak their minds.

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Z: THE MASKED MUSICAL

■ **WHAT:** World premiere of a new musical by Robert Cabell, directed by Joe Zingo
■ **WHEN:** 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and March 3-4
■ **WHERE:** South Eugene High School auditorium, 400 E. 19th Ave.
■ **HOW MUCH:** \$10 students and seniors, \$14 adults, at the Actors Cabaret of Eugene box office (683-4368)

Tyler Miller kisses the hand of Keeley St. Clair in "Z: The Masked Musical."



MUSICAL

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The actors, rehearsing on this particular stage for the first time, are uncomfortable with its relatively enormous size. Zingo is agitated over frequent mistakes; at one point he leans toward Cabell and says, "They're doing a lot of weird stuff to try to impress you. Feel honored, OK?"

Even though the two men talk constantly, they somehow are able to take in — and comment on everything happening on the stage. Cabell zeros in on the accents. Because the action occurs among people of Spanish descent, many actors have adopted a Latin-tinged dialect, some more successfully than others.

"What is that?" Cabell asks about one young woman's accent. Zingo sighs. "It's a little bit Puerto Rican."

The accent irritates Cabell. "I don't want any accents. Nothing."

"You're not going to get any accents," Zingo concurs. "Just clean diction."

Cabell sails on. "In 'Les Miz,' they used cockney accents for the French peasants. They should have just used a 'down home' accent."

"Yeah, but 'Les Miz' has run for seven years," Zingo argues triumphantly.

Unfazed, Cabell switches his attack. "My point exactly. It worked, didn't it?"

Back and forth they go, talking nonstop, neither taking any notes. Later, during a break following Act 1, Zingo calls the cast together to talk about what was observed.

"No accents," Cabell reminds Zingo. "No English accents, no Jewish accents, no Spanish accents, no Irish accents. Nothing. Just a Eugene accent."

Zingo, with a sparkle in his eye, cuts in. "Does that mean everybody has to be drugged?"

The cast roars in laughter. They need a good laugh to cut the tension — and frustration — of the rehearsal.

"Things have not gone smoothly. Because 'Z: The Masked Musical' is a work in progress, time and again actors have learned their lines and actions, only to discover that Cabell and Zingo have changed them. But then, change is expected in an upstart project like this.

Some handle it better than others.

On this night, the cast has run through the first act only to be blindsided afterward with the news that Zingo and Cabell have cut out a number of lines and shifted two songs to the second act, effectively eliminating 20 minutes of the play. Each person privately assesses the impact of these changes. The room is stone silent.

Then through this process many times, Cabell addresses the actors. "I know it's very frustrating when you get so many changes, but you guys are going to be great. It's going to be a wonderful show."

The cast applauds.

Apprenticeship

Cabell, who grew up in Eugene, has been down this route before. His shows "Pretty Faces" (1990) and "Two Hearts Over Easy" (1994) did well off Broadway.

Cabell has a lot riding on "Z: The Masked Musical." He wrote it with an eye toward getting it produced on Broadway, maybe in a year or two. But first it needs to



Above: Playwright Robert Cabell (left) and director Joe Zingo evaluate a rehearsal. Right: Cabell adjusts Tyler Miller's mask.

have some of the rough edges knocked off.

That's one reason he is giving the world premiere in Eugene: he believed the birthing process would go easier and cheaper here.

But there's more. Cabell and Zingo are old friends. It was working in theater in New York City, doing a "Masterpiece Theater" piece called "The Patriots," Cabell explains.

He went on to perform with some of the greatest names on the Great White Way: Elizabeth Allen and Paul Dumont in "Pajama Game," Peter Palmer and Aniko Farrell in "Oklahoma!," Dorothy Collins in "I Do I Do," Tommy Sands in "Mr. Roberts," Gall Stormer in "Cactus Flower," Carlos Romero in "My Wife Is an Angel" and Denise Loar in "South Pacific."

Although Cabell enjoyed dancing and acting, he liked writing even more. Two of his scripts were accepted in 1984 by the Musical Theatre Works, which hailed him as "a young talented composer."

Then one day, he went before the project's review board.

"One of the board members, Bernard Jacobs of the Schubert Theatre, said to me, 'Kid, you write good music and you got some nice stuff going, but I can produce 'Cats' for \$11 million and yours is going to cost me the same, and no one

knows who the hell you are. Go write a one-set, six-character show, get a reputation, then come back in five years and maybe I can raise money for your show.'

"So that's exactly what I did. I went out and started writing small musicals to get a reputation to get produced."

In 1985, he produced his first off-Broadway show, "Pageant," at the Panache Dinner Theater. The show was given a major off-Broadway production and renamed "Pretty Faces" in 1990, when it was mounted at the Actors Outlet Theater.

For the next two years, Cabell worked with Spelling International on syndicated TV's "Beverly Hills 90210" and launching the prime-time soap opera, "Melrose Place."

In 1994, his play "Two Hearts Over Easy" was staged at the Actors Playhouse. At the same time, concert presentations of his musicals "Dragon Myth" and "Sacharine" went on the boards in Lincoln Center.

"The reviews and the acknowledgement helped me to get to other things," Such as "Z: The Masked Musical," which he started writing in 1993.

Hero sandwich

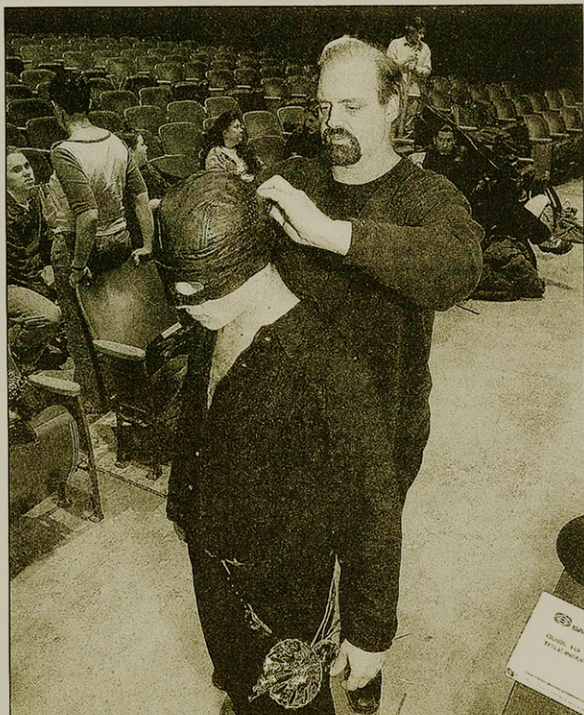
"Zorro was the first action-adventure hero," Cabell says. "He was the first masked, caped crusader. That's what made him so unique."

Cabell wrote the script and the songs, which he describes as having "a Spanish aspect, with a little bit of Broadway."

The script done, Cabell gathered financial backers, formed Get Z'd Productions and recorded a concept album. It featured salsa king Roberto Gomez and teen idol Ruben Gomez alternating as Zorro, along with such Broadway performers as Deborah Gibson, Kaye Ballard, Dan Conroy, Michael DeVries, Rob Evan, Marc Kudisch, Jodie Langel, Jeff McCarthy, Sean McDermott, Phyllis Newman and Christiane Noll.

The splash to kick off the album led to four staged readings, all before capacity audiences, at the Land Theater. Afterward, Cabell says interview Broadway directors were prompted about directing the show, including Robert Kalflin ("Candide," "Vanities"), Lynn Taylor Corbette ("Titanic," "Swing"), Wayne Cilento ("Tommy," "Dream," "Jerry's Girls") and David Bell ("Change in the Hier").

Cabell points out that while the acclaim is nice, the overhead is



mounting. The CD cost \$20,000 to produce, and the staged readings \$35,000.

"The CD was to get an international presence about. 'Here we are, this is what we want to do, this is our story of Zorro.' It's really worked."

Since then, a new recording has been made that is "more in-depth, has more songs, and is more acted in the singing."

Why Eugene?

Having the musical open in Eugene — financed by Actors Cabaret of Eugene — fits into a global marketing strategy that includes at least two subsequent productions.

"We were in negotiations for (Montclair) New Jersey," Cabell says. "But we've had to suspend that for right now. We're also in negotiations for Philadelphia. Those are all on hold until the Europe deal is settled."

The "Europe deal" is "a tour that begins in France, then goes to the Netherlands and England." Those dates, over the next two years, are still being worked out, Cabell says.

Earlier plans to do a limited tour of the Pacific Northwest have been scratched.

In any event, Cabell says he intends "to take Joe (Zingo) forward with me." Whether any of the Eugene cast members will go along, too, has not yet been decided.

Being touted for the lead role on Broadway is former Menudo heartthrob Ruben Gomez.

"He signed an agreement he would be available for the project," Cabell says.

The musical is a classic swashbuckler that explains the origin of the Zorro legend. Cabell presents him as a sensitive 20-year-old who aids the show's

says. "That's why the anthem of the show is called 'We Do What We Must Do.' It's all about standing up for community, making people rally together, supporting the community."

"That's something I believe in." Cabell stayed close to the original 1924 book, "The Curse of Capistrano," in which a noble family is being ravaged by the district governor. Appalled, Zorro dons a mask and flashes his steel.

"Our story has a little bit of mysticism, lots of romance, lots of adventure and sword fighting instead of dancing," he says. "You don't have to watch 'Xena' and 'Hercules,' you can see 'Z,' because we've got all of it."

The Eugene cast features Tyler Miller as Zorro, play Keeley St. Clair, Rick Lloyd, Larry Cox, Deirdre Doucette, Caitlin Upshaw, Mark William Garner, Chris Pinto, Eric Williams, Dan Kelley, John Elliott, Seth Carter, Cecilia Lane, David Kelly, Olive Roberts, Jai Tumolo, Mindy Nirenstein and Cara Maltz, among others. Jim Roberts is the musical director; John Elliott is the fight coordinator.

Cabell praises the company for doing "amazing things with this project. There's been 120 percent commitment, and I'm just thrilled."

During the rehearsal, with the actors going at each other in daring sword fights, Zingo offers that he is "concerned over whether the audience is going to buy the show's premise."

"It's fine. It's going to be fun," Cabell reassures him.

Zingo turns to a visitor. "He has New York ideas. I tell him, 'That's New York, this is Eugene.'"

"It'll work," Cabell purrs confidently. "It'll be just fine. Trust me."

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