

About five years ago, I heard an interview on NPR with Tom Reiss on his new book: *The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal, and the Real Count of Monte Cristo*. It's a (now Pulitzer-winning) biography of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, the father of Alexandre Dumas who wrote our treasured stories *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*. In that interview, Reiss revealed (to me, at least – and I'm sure to many other listeners) that these giants of French history and literature were men of color. My first thought was being appalled that was news to me. My second thought was to text Ty Jones and say I didn't know that, did you know that? (he did, of course), maybe you could write a play about that, can CTH do the Dumas canon? (he was already on it, of course).

I mean, check out this story:

Our author's father, Thomas-Alexandre Davy de la Pailleterie, was born into slavery. Thomas was the son of the Marquis Alexandre Antoine Davy de la Pailleterie -- a French nobleman and *général commissaire* of the artillery in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (modern day Haiti). Thomas's mother was Marie-Cessette Dumas (a surname that's possibly from the words *du mas* = of the farm, belonging to the plantation), likely born and captured in Gabon, definitely enslaved, and owned by the Marquis. In 1775, the Marquis sold her, 14 year-old Thomas and Thomas' sisters in order to finance the Marquis' return to France to take over the family estates there. Some months later, he bought his son Thomas again (leaving Marie-Cessette Dumas and daughters in slavery), and brought him to France. There, teen Thomas was of the nobility, and was educated, trained in weapons, etc. Ten years later, Thomas joined the military as a dragoon – notably choosing his enslaved mother's surname, Dumas, and shedding his father's. He rapidly rose through the ranks during the French Revolution, commanded the Black Legion, and became the equivalent of a four-star general commanding 50k troops, and challenged the choices of Napoleon (who let Thomas languish unransomed in an enemy dungeon for two years while he consolidated power, reinstated slavery, and made miscegenation and other race laws that invalidated Thomas' marriage and required special dispensation to stay in his home). Thomas-Alexandre Dumas achieved the highest rank of any black commander in a white society, ever—a record he held until 1989, when Colin Powell became a four-star general in the USA.

Thomas' son Alexandre Dumas— author of *The Three Musketeers* – was four years old when his father died in 1806. The family was poor after his father's death, and his mother couldn't afford to send him to much formal education, though his father's reputation and rank offered connections for advancement. Alexandre read everything he could get his hands on, self-taught. Beginning as a playwright, he then immortalized his father's swashbuckling heroics, inspiration for his serial novels that have been anchor points of Western Literature for the past two hundred years. Alexandre was also a hoot, apparently – generous, big-hearted, and hilarious in person. I would love to meet him.

Playwright Catherine Bush's adaptation of Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* is terrific – it has a cinematic flow, but is very much of the theatre, with its doublings, lean and powerful action, and confidence in the medium. What a thrill that CTH gets to take on the NYC Premiere of her script!

And it's right on time. I look around at 1628 Paris, the setting of the story, and see an indulgent, easily manipulated king who's left much of the governing to his chief minister, Cardinal Richilieu. I see that Cardinal taking action in the name of God and the good people to change the power structure from regional peerage to a centralized state with him at the center of that power—a deliberate fracturing. I look around at 1844 France, when Alexandre Dumas wrote the story, and see the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe after the ousting of the Bourbons, who styled himself 'King of the French' rather than 'King of France' to emphasize his affinity with the people, but whose reign was dominated by corrupt exploits of the wealthy and well-connected. I look around at 2017 NYC, and see how I get a little heart attack every time a *New York Times* news alert pings my phone, and I think: this play is right on time. This play summons up our gumption to come together, reminds us that the forces of corruption are not impossible to defeat. We can fight with honor and dignity for what's right, and win. Marie-Cessette Dumas' grandson Alexandre wrote us that gift, allowing us to join these musketeers with epic good humor, love, and admiration for the people who fought to achieve some bend on that arc of the moral universe.

In our production, our talented cast of 20 will dash up and down and through the old city playground of Christopher & Justin Swader's scenic design in the buoyant costume design of Rachel Dozier-Ezell, darting in and out of Kate Bashore's dramatic light design to the beat of Luqman Brown's sound design on Shayshahn McPherson's original music. Tiffany Rea-Fisher and Elisa Monte Dance choreography guides us through the timelessness of the fight for right – and Emmanuel Brown designs those fights with swashbuckling panache.

It's an incredible team that's bringing *The Three Musketeers* to Harlem this summer.

All for one, and one for all!

Jenny Bennett  
Director.