



Cyrano de Bergerac

Essay by David Shepard

Pathé Stencil Color was introduced about 1904 and resembled natural color photography far less than it did painting-in-motion, which it basically was. In Paris, the film was projected frame by frame onto a ground glass screen, where Mme. Thullier, the most famous stencil-color artist, selected the colors and traced, one color at a time with a device called a Pantograph, the area of each frame of film chosen for each of up to four colors. The Pantograph was essentially a mechanical linkage, at the other end of which was a knife which cut away the area of a stencil the size of the actual 35mm frame to be colored. These colors were then printed by a process similar to silk-screening successively through each of the four stencils upon a black-and-white print of the film. Because the film was colored one shot at a time and each positive print was then spliced together shot by shot, different color palettes could be used for successive shots, yielding incredibly rich and varied results in this superb reproduction.

Three years were devoted to coloring CYRANO DE BERGERAC, so that this 1922 film was not fully released until the fall of 1925! And because only a limited number of hand-colored prints were available, the film did not receive the wide circulation necessary to establish its well-deserved place in the public memory as an outstanding classic of the screen.

The director of CYRANO DE BERGERAC, Augusto Genina, made more than sixty films between 1913 and 1955. His silent work, first assembled in retrospective at the 1990 Pordenone Film Festival in Italy, stands up against the best in the world at that time. His American reputation rests primarily on a French film of 1930, *Prix de Beauty (The Beauty Prize)*, which starred the radiant Louise Brooks. Scenarist Mario Camerini's signature film, decades after CYRANO, is the 1956 version of *War and Peace* with Henry Fonda and Audrey Hepburn, directed by King Vidor; however, Camerini also directed 47 films until 1972, the best-known being *Ulysses* starring Kirk Douglas (1954).

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