The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages. Insights is published by the Utah Shakespeare Festival, 351 West Center Street; Cedar City, UT 84720. Bruce C. Lee, publication manager and editor; Phil Hermansen, art director. Copyright © 2016, Utah Shakespeare Festival. Please feel free to download and print Insights, as long as you do not remove any identifying mark of the Utah Shakespeare Festival.

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Cover photo: A scene from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2016 production of The Three Musketeers.
The Three Musketeers: 2016 version

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About the Playwrights: Ken Ludwig and Alexandre Dumas

By Vanessa Hunt

With a history of six shows on Broadway and seven shows on London's West End, Ken Ludwig is no stranger to the theatre scene. His credits include two Laurence Olivier awards, the Helen Hayes award, the Edgar Award for Best Mystery from the Mystery Writers of America, the Southeastern Theatre Conference Distinguished Career Award, and the Edwin Forrest Award for Services to the Theatre. Ludwig is best known for his first play, Lend Me a Tenor, which won three Tony awards out of nine nominations. (The Utah Shakespeare Festival also produced a musical adaption, Lend Me a Tenor: the Musical, in 2007.) His plays have also been commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Bristol Old Vic. Other works are Crazy for You (a Tony and Olivier awards winner for Best Musical), Moon Over Buffalo, Leading Ladies, Twentieth Century, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Game's Afoot, The Fox on the Fairway, Midsummer/Jersey, Treasure Island, and The Three Musketeers.

Ken Ludwig was born on March 15, 1950 in York, Pennsylvania. His father was a doctor, and his mother was a former Broadway chorus girl. From birth, Broadway was a part of his life. While attending Harvard, Ludwig had the opportunity to study music under the tutelage of Leonard Bernstein. He also studied theatre history at Cambridge University. Ludwig practiced law for several years, on top of writing twenty-two plays and musicals.

With many successful shows under his belt, Ludwig was commissioned by the Bristol Old Vic in London to adapt a play based on Alexandre Dumas's timeless story of heroism, treachery, and honor, The Three Musketeers. The show was to open in December of 2006 and run for eight weeks during the Christmas season. The play's world premiere was December 6, 2006, and it opened to rave reviews. The play does not follow Dumas's story exactly, but rather Ludwig capitalizes on the spirit of romantic adventure found in the original story and then makes it his own in adaptation. (The most noticeable change is the addition of a new character, D’Artagnan’s kid sister, Sabine.)

As a prolific French historian, playwright, and author, Alexandre Dumas is best known for two stories, The Count of Monte Cristo and The Three Musketeers. They are timeless classics that most audiences are familiar with, whether they have read the stories or not. Born July 24, 1802 in a small village outside of Paris, Alexandre Dumas was the son of a military general under Napoleon. His father was imprisoned after criticizing Napoleon’s Egypt campaign, and soon after being released he died of poor health, leaving Alexandre to be cared for by his mother. She worked to provide an education for her son, but Alexandre was not particularly fond of formal education and soon found work with a local notary. Then, in 1822, he left for Paris and found a love for the literary world. He was an avid reader of the works of Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott.

After arriving in Paris, Dumas was hired as a scribe for the duc d’Orleans, later King Louis Philippe. Dumas became a scholar within the world of playwriting and learned from and collaborated with many of the notable playwrights of the time. His earliest works included the plays Henry III and His Court, The Tower of Nesle, Kean, and Antony. He was one of the first writers of the new Romantic movement, publishing works alongside his friend and rival Victor Hugo. Dumas’s works were a breath of fresh air compared to the Neoclassic works that were so often found on the stages of Paris.
While Dumas found success in Paris, he came down with a bout of cholera in 1832 during a widespread epidemic. His physician ordered him to leave Paris and take a tour of Europe, resulting in his visiting many countries, including Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, England, and Germany. During his travels, he kept impeccable records, which he then published in a series of short stories, novels, and essays.

As he continued to travel around Europe, Dumas began writing his trilogy known as the d’Artagnan Romances, which included The Three Musketeers, Twenty Years After, and The Vicomte of Bragelonne: Ten Years Later. The first and most popular novel of the series, The Three Musketeers, came about as Dumas was researching the history of Louis XIV. Dumas supposedly found manuscripts in the National Library of France which detailed the events of the life of the captain of the Musketeers of the Guard under Louis XIV, Charles Ogier de Batz de Castelmore, Comte d’Artagnan, on whom Dumas then based his main character. The Three Musketeers was set in 1625 and was first published in the magazine Le Siècle between March and July 1844. In creating The Three Musketeers, Dumas collaborated with Auguste Maquet, whom he initially began collaborating with in 1837. This led to more collaborations with other authors, although they mainly offered suggestions for plots, while Dumas did the rest of the work, filling in the actual details of the stories.

With the success of The Three Musketeers, Dumas followed up with his novel The Count of Monte Cristo and solidified his position as one of, if not the, greatest writers of the nineteenth century. Financially set, Dumas looked for a place of solitary so that he could concentrate on his writing. He relocated to Port Marly, Yvelines, France where he built the Chateau de Monte Cristo. He frequently enjoyed entertaining guests at his home, but soon his spending became too great and he was forced to sell Chateau de Monte Cristo due to his increasing debt. To avoid creditors, he fled to Brussels, Belgium in 1851. While there, he published many more works, known as his Valois Romances, which included his autobiography.

Alexandre Dumas died December 5, 1870 at his son’s villa in Puys, near Dieppe, France, not long after a scandalous liaison with an American circus girl. He was initially buried in the cemetery of Villers-Collerets, but in 2002, his remains were moved to the Pantheon in Paris, resting amongst other literary greats such as Emile Zola and Victor Hugo.

While Alexandre Dumas had over 1,200 published works to his name, The Three Musketeers will forever remain one of his greatest accomplishments. This is evidenced by the scores of adaptations that continue to be created with Dumas’s story as the focal point. With the creation of the stage version of Ken Ludwig’s adaptation of Dumas’s classic, it is plain to see that The Three Musketeers is still relevant in today’s society. In an article from kenludwig.com, when asked about how he measures the success of this play, Ludwig responded by saying, “I want the audience to come out feeling exhilarated. I want them to feel that they’ve taken part in one of the great stories of all time—that they’ve laughed, been frightened, cried—felt a part of this magnificent world that Dumas created; and I want them to feel that they enjoyed every second of it.”
Characters: The Three Musketeers

D'ARTAGNAN: Our hero; eighteen years old. Raised in French province of Gascony, leaves home to go to Paris. Brave, excellent swordsman, and enthusiastic to become a musketeer but also impulsive, hotheaded, and inexperienced. Falls in love with Constance Bonacieux.

ATHOS: Leader of the three musketeers. Full of shadows, intelligent, courageous; precise in his sword fighting.

PORTHOS: One of the three musketeers. Humorous, vain, slave to fashion, good-hearted; comical and jaunty in his sword fighting.

ARAMIS: One of the three musketeers. Romantic, handsome, hot tempered, studying to be a priest; melodramatic in his swordfighting.

CARDINAL RICHELIEU: Enemy of the musketeers and (though not openly) to the king and queen.

ROCHEFORT: The cardinal's henchman and captain of the Cardinal's Guard.

MONSIEUR DE TREVILLE: Captain of the musketeers, old friend of D'Artagnan's father.

KING LOUIS XIII: A simple-minded king, always being played by Cardinal Richelieu.

QUEEN ANNE: Called Anne of Austria but originally comes from Spain; having an affair with the duke of Buckingham.

CONSTANCE BONACIEUX: The queen's lady in waiting, falls in love with d'Artagnan.

SABINE: D'Artagnan's seventeen-year-old sister, sent to Paris to go to school. Falls in love with Aramis.

MILADY: The Countess de Winter, most dangerous woman in all of France. Beautiful, cunning, strong, and ruthless.

SOPHIE DELACROIX: “Niece” of Cardinal Richelieu.

D'ARTAGNAN’S FATHER AND MOTHER

BASILLE: Looks after horses at Mauriac inn, cohort of Rochefort.

RAVANCHE: Rough and dangerous bully, cohort of Rochefort.

DEBRIS: One of Cardinal’s Guards.

DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM: The Queen’s British lover.

ADÉLE: Admirer of Porthos.

ELISE: Admirer of Aramis.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Of the Convent of the Sacred Heart where Sabine is sent to school.

FACHE: Supporter of Cardinal Richelieu.

STANLEY: The Duke of Buckingham’s major-domo.

RUDDIAN

INNKEEPER

SISTER AT CONVENT SCHOOL

ABBESS

OLD WOMAN
Synopsis: *The Three Musketeers*

It is 1625, and eighteen-year-old d’Artagnan is preparing to leave home for Paris with a desire to become a famous musketeer to “defend the king and protect the queen” of France. His father gives him last words of advice, his sword, and other parting gifts. He also sends d’Artagnan’s seventeen-year-old sister, Sabine, with him so that he may accompany her to school safely. She is the quintessential tomboy and would rather become a musketeer herself than go to school.

Sabine poses as d’Artagnan’s servant, and, as they travel, they quickly become entangled in numerous encounters with the most dangerous man in Europe, Cardinal Richelieu, as well as Rochefort, the captain of his guard, and the infamous Countess de Winter, known as Milady. They also become acquainted with the greatest heroes of the day—Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, the famous musketeers—and inadvertently join forces with them in defending the queen’s honor during a time of personal tumult all while protecting each other. “All for one. And one for all.”
Heroes and Heroines We Dare Only Dream About

By Ace G. Pilkington

Ken Ludwig, who wrote the adaptation of The Three Musketeers that the Utah Shakespeare Festival is producing this summer, says in the “Introduction” to his play, “Reading The Three Musketeers . . . is like reading the best and longest comic book in the world” ([New York: Samuel French, 2008], 9). He also says, “Dumas had an almost unique ability to create myths with a stroke of the pen” (10). And he adds, Dumas “peoples these adventures with the kinds of heroes and heroines we dare only dream about” (10). While mixing myths with comic books may sound a bit unusual, in the twenty-first century it has almost become the norm.

Dumas, however, seems to have seen his historical novels differently. He said his purpose was “to interpret history rather than to transcribe it” (Lord Sudley, “Introduction,” The Three Musketeers [New York: Penguin, 1982], 15), but in his vast, interconnected group of novels, he saw himself as writing about history, not fantasy, and he knew the difference since he also wrote about a vampire in The Pale Lady and a werewolf in The Wolf-Leader. As Thomas Flanagan says about The Three Musketeers, “Dumas and his collaborator, Auguste Maquet, believed that they were building, although very loosely, on fact” (“Introduction” [New York: Signet, 1991], xiii). Like most historical novelists or playwrights (and Dumas was both), he is sometimes truer to his story than to his sources. Still, I think Dumas would have been surprised by the notion that his characters were “heroes and heroines we dare only dream about.”

Part of the reason for the difference in perspective between Dumas and Ken Ludwig is that Dumas lived inside the world he wrote about in a way that is sometimes hard for us to understand in the twenty-first century. It is a commonplace to say that Dumas found himself in his characters and his characters in himself. The Musketeers may seem impossible swashbucklers to us, but it didn’t take a flight of fancy for Dumas to imagine himself as d’Artagnan. Many events in Dumas’ life seem more like his fictions than our facts, and his first duel is a particularly apposite example. It took place in 1825, when he was only twenty-two. As Dumas puts it, On “3 January . . . one of our friends, by name Tallancourt, having . . . been promoted from his office, to the Duc d’Orléans’ library . . . treated me and another of our friends called Betz to a dinner at the Palais-Royal” (My Memoirs [New York: Macmillan Company, 1908], vol. III, chapter VI. Project Gutenberg e-book). Both of Dumas’s friends had fought at Waterloo. Following the end of that enormous battle, Tallancourt “felt in his pockets and found that they were empty, he struck his stomach and felt that it was hollow, therefore, catching sight of a small dismounted cannon, and being endowed with herculean strength, he lifted it upon his shoulder and sold it, two leagues away, to an ironfounder, for ten francs.” It seems that the universe itself could not allow Dumas’s two friends (who create the circumstances in which the story happens and also serve as seconds in the duel) to be boring clerks. They are grizzled veterans of Napoleon’s wars (aged thirty-two and thirty-five respectively), and Tallancourt sounds as though he could be one of the inspirations for Porthos.

In any event, Dumas was inordinately proud of the large cloak and top boots he was wearing, and when a stranger said a few words “accompanied by a glance in my direction, and a burst of laughter,” the young would-be playwright challenged him to a duel. Even though Dumas did not hear the words, the look and the laughter were enough. The duel was originally set for January 5, but Dumas’s opponent failed to appear. His excuse was that he had been “skating on the canal the whole of the previous day” and was too tired to get up early. When the two finally did meet, Dumas’s father’s sword proved two inches shorter than that of his opponent. In answer, however, to the suggestion that the longer sword should be assigned at random, Dumas said, with just the right touch of fierce sentiment, “I much preferred to lose the two extra inches of steel, rather than to have my father’s sword turned against my breast.”

Dumas quickly wounded his opponent in the shoulder, and the affair, part irascibility, part vanity, part nobility, and part comedy, came to an end. Dumas’s memoirs are filled with duels, his own and those of his friends. At one point, he fought a duel over whether or not he had written all of the play La Tour de Nesle (Edith Saunders, The
Prodigal Father [New York: Longmans, Green and CO, 1951], 35). In fact, he says, with, perhaps, a bit of youthful exaggeration, “I have a perfect horror of disputing with my friends, and much prefer to fight a duel with any of them” (My Memoirs, vol. IV, chapter II).

It is not only Alexandre Dumas’s life that is outside the experience of most twenty-first century audiences, but also that of his father, whom he idolized and whose exploits and traumas he used to make characters as diverse as Porthos and the Count of Monte Cristo. General Alex Dumas (also called Thomas-Alexandre) was the son of a French count and a slave from what is now Haiti. He rose to the rank of general during the Napoleonic wars, and to call his exploits and personal qualities legendary may be to undervalue them. As “the strongest man in the French army” he was supposed to be able to “stand up in the stirrups, take hold of an overhead beam, and lift himself and his horse bodily off the ground” (Tom Reiss, The Black Count [New York: Crown Publishers, 2012], 8). “He once fought three duels in one day, winning all three despite being gashed in the head” (8). As a corporal, “he single-handedly captured twelve enemy soldiers” (8). Even more impressive, “he led four horsemen in an attack on an enemy post manned by over fifty men,” killing six and taking sixteen prisoners himself (8).

Perhaps his most remarkable exploit came when he was general-in-chief of the Army of the Alps. General Dumas “put on spiked boots and led his men up seemingly impregnable ice cliffs at night to surprise an Austrian battery” that appeared invincible (Reiss, 9). At the top his men came up against a “palisade which they had considerable difficulty” getting over. “‘Leave it to me!’ cried General Dumas and, taking hold of them, one after the other, by the seats of their trousers, threw them over the obstacle on to the heads of the terrified enemy” (Andre Maurois, The Titans [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957], 23). But as usual in the lives of the Dumas family, humor came hand-in-hand with terror. The climb up the ice cliffs had been extremely dangerous. “‘Every man who falls,’ said Dumas curtly, ‘must understand beforehand that he is a dead man—that nothing can save him. It will be useless then to cry out—and by so doing he may give the alarm, and ruin our chances.’ Three men, so the son tells us, did fall; and their bodies dropped into the darkness, bounding from crag to crag. But not a cry was heard—not a moan—not a sigh!” (Harry Spurr, The Life and Writings of Alexandre Dumas [New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1902], 7). In exchange for such sacrifice, General Dumas “took not only 1,700 prisoners and over forty artillery pieces but Mont Cenis, the key to the Alps” (Reiss, 9).

Some of what Alexandre Dumas wrote in his historical novels is not fact. And sometimes to us it feels like the wildest of fantasies, but for him it must have seemed to be a more colorful and slightly better organized version of his own life. With his stories, he could bring back the father he had lost when he was a child. He could summon the giants of history and put clever, remarkably appropriate words in their mouths. He could make around himself that life of honor and adventure which he felt was his by right of birth and mirth and imagination. No wonder that it was usual for him to begin writing at seven in the morning and to stay at his desk “until seven at night, so engrossed that he was often unaware of hunger and thirst and did not pause to eat or drink” (Saunders, 121). It must sometimes have been hard for him to tell the difference between his life and the living characters he was creating.

For a little while this summer, courtesy of Ken Ludwig’s play, Festival audiences will have a chance to change our twenty-first century perspective for that older, nobler, funnier vision that belonged to Alexandre Dumas.