

# Pride and Prejudice at the Chemainus Theatre Festival February 17-March 25, 2017. A review.

March 1, 2017 By [@lacouvee](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

## **Pride and Prejudice at the Chemainus Theatre Festival February 17-March 25, 2017. A review.**

In Janet Munsil's witty and humorous adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (playing at the Chemainus Theatre Festival until March 25<sup>th</sup>) it's easy to see Mrs. Bennett (**Amy Lee Newman** is splendid in the role, with abundant nervous energy channeled in short sharp bursts) as no more than a flibbertigibbet, an annoying, meddlesome mother, but in the reality of 1813 England, her concerns are entirely valid. Five daughters of marriageable age, in a household that was comfortable but not wealthy, would have definitely been cause for worry; and given a good-natured and imperturbable husband (**Paul Terry** portrays the essence of calm at the centre of a female-centric storm) her anxiety is understandably heightened. (see below for links to information on this topic). Focusing on Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Bennett (**Yoshié Bancroft** has great facility for impish observances) this two hundred-year-old story of love, romance and snap judgements still draws happy audiences. Whether for escapism—a chance to while away a couple of hours immersed in the genteel ways of upper class England—, a predilection for pure romance—a desire to see couples thrown asunder and then re-united—, or to revel in biting social commentary and language, aficionados of the novel will be extremely pleased by this production, the opening one in the festival's twenty fifth season.



*Brett Harris and Yoshié Bancroft. Photo: Cim McDonald*

Design efforts have been thoroughly focused in re-creating the harmonious architectural interiors of English manors within the confines of the intimate stage. Set designer **Brian Ball** utilizes an ingenious arrangement of three staircases (one on each side of the home at the front and another at the rear) to assist in the choreography (**Kayla Dunbar**) necessary to move twelve actors (and numerous musical instruments and furniture pieces) to-and-fro. A balcony adds height and a sense of grandeur—particularly important in scenes at Mr. Darcy's estate Pemberley and Lady Catherine de Bough's Rosings Park. Symmetrical hangings add an additional note of refinement; louvered doors in the wall open to reveal rooms in the homes—creating depth, and to permit ease during the many dance numbers.

The times of day and seasons flow under the lighting design of **John Webber**—with a singularly beautiful moment at the play's end when stars twinkle gently in the deep blue of the night sky.

The elegant costume designs by **Crystal Hanson** reflect the social status of the characters—the girls' gowns, light—permitting ease of movement; those of Mrs. Gardiner and Lady Catherine more stately and intricate. The men are

handsomely turned out—whether in fitted waistcoats and breeches or more comfortable trousers and jackets; it's any wonder heads turn for the soldiers of the regiment—Mr. Wickham (**Erik Gow**) cuts a fine figure in red and white. **Julie McIsaac's** direction is lyrical—the care given to language is flawless; pacing, perfect—allowing time for each pointed jab and sarcastic comment to land with the most intent to wound or harm, or for every careful consideration and argument to be fully developed. *Pride and Prejudice* is a work of ideas, ones that must be expounded and explained for an average North American audience far-removed from the reality of 19<sup>th</sup> century England and the cast succeeds marvellously in this mission. Adding to the harmony of the language are the extensive musical numbers (musical direction **Melissa Morris**)—every actor plays at least one instrument and every scene change includes a musical number. Audiences are enjoined to enter the theatre 15 minutes before the curtain where they are treated to a mini-recital before the play begins, as well as the most engaging front of house “speech” I have ever heard. With a cast of twelve playing nineteen characters, it can be a challenge for an audience—perhaps unfamiliar with the plot—to make sense of what's going on; here the ensemble and designers are to be congratulated for portrayals that are distinctive. **Catriona Murphy** is warm and kind as the aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, and quite terrifying as the harridan Lady Catherine de Bourgh—her entry when she confronts Lizzie, a surprising moment of stagecraft (which I don't want to spoil for my readers); **Matthew Hendrickson** displays equal amounts of kind consideration as Mr. Gardiner, the girls' uncle, and a terrible sense of entitled self-worth as Mr. Collins, the heir to Mr. Bennett's fortune; likewise **Kayla Dunbar** is bookish and lofty as Mary, the third Bennett daughter, and sensible and determined as old-maid (at 27!) Charlotte Lucas; **Lindsay Warnock** is flighty and flirty as Lydia and a force to be reckoned with as Caroline Bingley—determined to upend any alliance between her brother Charles and Jane, or Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy; **Melissa Morris** is sweet and sincere as Jane, the eldest Bennett daughter and appears briefly as Georgina Darcy; **Julie Casselman** as the youngest sister Kitty is playful and full of life, and the epitome of sickly as Lady Anne de Bourgh, the intended of Mr. Darcy.



*Kayla Dunbar. Photo: Cim McDonald*

In a play that centers of the interactions of the women in a household, the male characters could be given short shrift, however they are cultured (**Chris Walters** as Charles Bingley), forceful and measured (**Brett Harris** as Fitzwilliam Darcy), conniving and dangerous (**Erik Gow** as Mr. Wickham), ambitious and conceited (**Matthew Hendrickson** as Mr. Collins), and sarcastic and cynical (**Paul Terry** as Mr. Bennett—happy to retreat from all the feminine pursuits that surround him)

Finally, although the central point of *Pride and Prejudice* is that love is not about the instantaneous chemistry felt from a glance across a room, it is absolutely paramount the actors playing Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennett are able to quickly establish a bond—even of antipathy—believable to the audience and allowing for the development of true and mutual feeling and respect. The stage chemistry of Yoshié Bancroft and Brett Harris is like the tides of the ocean—back and forth, by moments restrained, then bursting forth with passion to subside and build again. When the final embrace arrives, everyone heaves a deep sigh of relief and joy.

Under the expert guidance of Julie McIsaac the entire ensemble excels at creating and sustaining the tension necessary to bring the many plot points to fruition.

If this is the beginning of the 25<sup>th</sup> season, I can't wait to see what other theatrical treats await!

**Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen, adapted by Janet Munsil**

**Chemainus Theatre Festival**

**February 17-March 25, 2017**

**Tickets: \$26-\$69 without buffet \$38-98 with—depending on day and time**

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**Cast and Creative Team (alphabetically)**

**Brian Ball** *Set Designer*

**Yoshié Bancroft** *Elizabeth "Lizzie" Bennet*

**Julie Casselman** *Kitty Bennet/Lady Anne de Bourgh*

**Kayla Dunbar** *Mary Bennet/Charlotte Lucas/Choreographer/Dance Captain*

**Erik Gow** *Mr. George Wickham*

**Crystal Hanson** *Costume Designer*

**Brett Harris** *Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy/Dialect Coach*

**Matthew Hendrickson** *Mr. Collins/Mr. Gardiner*

**Julie McIsaac** *Director*

**Melissa Morris** *Jane Bennet/Georgiana Darcy/Musical Director*

**Caitriona Murphy** *Mrs. Gardiner/Lady Catherine de Bourgh*

**Amy Lee Newman** *Mrs. Bennett/Mrs. Reynold*

**Anne Taylor** *Stage Manager*

**Paul Terry** *Mr. Bennet*

**Chris Walters** *Mr. Charles Bingley*

**Lindsay Warnock** *Lydia Bennet/Caroline Bingley*

**Mel Watkins** *Assistant Stage Manager*

**John Webber** *Lighting Designer*

**Further Reading:**

<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number12/heldman.htm>

<http://pemberley.com/janeinfo/ppjalmap.html>