

THE COMMONWEAL THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY

by Lauren Gunderson
and Margot Melcon



a romantic Christmas comedy

NOV 16—DEC 22

PROFESSIONAL LIVE THEATRE

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We, at the **Commonweal Theatre**, acknowledge that we work and gather on the ancestral lands of the Dakota Nation and other Indigenous peoples. We recognize these Nations as the original caretakers of this land and acknowledge the injustices committed against them. We strive to promote healing and inclusion through storytelling, which is fundamental to our mission.

As artists in our community we have a responsibility to create a welcoming, inclusive, and nurturing environment where visitors and community members can gather and explore big ideas through live theatre. Fostering such an environment begins with education and reflection. Our Land Acknowledgement is just one way the Commonweal exercises our commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Thank you to the Minnesota Historical Society, Lanesboro Historical Society, Prairie Island Indian Community, Mississippi Valley Archeology Center, and Mower County Historical Society for assisting in the research that led to the formation of our Land Acknowledgement.



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Metis artist Victoria Scattergood is inspired by historical ledger drawings which were popular across the northern and southern plains of Canada and the US. She puts a unique perspective on it, using actual historical ledger prints from the late 1800s with beautiful, hand drawn animals.

WELCOME TO THE COMMONWEAL!

Welcome to the final production of our 2024 season, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*. We are delighted to share this “spin-off” of the great Jane Austen novel *Pride and Prejudice*. And we are eager to learn the further adventures of the Bennet clan. (And for those of you who are unfamiliar with Austen’s work, you needn’t worry; this story stands alone on its own just fine.)

Who better to lead us through this entertaining imagining than long-time director and friend of the Commonwealth: Craig Johnson! Craig’s love of all things English, his facility with actors, and his masterful way of crafting stories has served the company well, ever since his first voyage with us in 2002 with Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. In our first concept meeting for this play, Craig shared with the designers that this play is all about “the follies and foibles of people falling in love and trying to work out what they’re life is going to be.” This is true for those who have yet to find their happily ever after and those who, apparently, have.

And with that we bid you thanks, wishes for a joyous holiday season for yourself, and the sincere hope that you will join us for our 2025 season, which promises to fulfill our deepest need for storytelling and community.

Happy holidays!

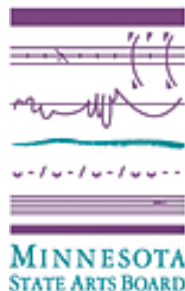


HAL CROPP
Producing Artistic Director



The Commonwealth Theatre Company is a member of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts and a constituent member of Theatre Communications Group. This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

208 Parkway Avenue N., P.O. Box 15
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(800)657-7025 • (507)467-2525
Commonwealththeatre.org



THE COMPANY

THE ARTIST/ADMINISTRATOR MODEL

The Commonwealth Theatre operates under a unique model in which all resident company members have specific, non-artistic responsibilities in addition to their artistic projects. This innovative approach has a great many benefits, most recently illustrated by the fact that we were able to keep our team fully employed throughout the pandemic, allowing us to reopen our doors and once again bring you professional live theatre at the earliest possible opportunity—one of the first theaters in the nation to do so.

LIZZY ANDRETTA (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2017

Actor/Development Associate/Dixon House Artist Residence Manager

This Season: Mary (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*), Rachel (*The Outsider*), Cassie (*Rumors*); Co-Props Design (*Ugly Lies the Bone*)

Commonweal Highlights: Amalia (*She Loves Me*), Senga (*Dancing Lessons*), Meg (*Leading Ladies*), Rosa (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*), Gabriella (*Boeing Boeing*), Mina (*Dracula: Prince of Blood*), Mrs. Kendal (*The Elephant Man*); choreographer (*Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Stones in His Pockets*, and *A Christmas Carol* (2021))

Education: MFA in Acting from the East 15 Acting School; BS from Skidmore College

CODY BEYER (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2022

Actor/Designer/Technical Director & Facilities Manager

This Season: Stevie (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Scenic Design (*The Outsider*); Co-Scenic Design (*Rumors* and *Doubt*); Mr. Darcy (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: Sipos (*She Loves Me*), Edmond Rostand (*Bernhardt/Hamlet*), White Knight (*Alice in Winter Wonderland*); Scenic Design (*Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*); Props Design (*Deathtrap* and *Good People*) **Other Credits:** Chicago credits include: Banquo in *Macbeth* for Theatre-Y; and Tech Director for several Hell in a Handbag Productions

Education: BA Honors Theatre, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

"Here's to another year of sharing stories with this wonderful community!"

THE 2025 SEASON

The Half-Life of Marie Curie

an ode to friendship by Lauren Gunderson

The Angel Next Door

*a romantic romp
by Paul Slade Smith*

Lone Star Spirits

*a small-town comedy
by Josh Tobiessen*

King Lear

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by William Shakespeare*

A Sherlock Carol

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THE COMPANY

STELA BURDT (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2001

Actor/Music Director/Director of Administration

This Season: Kacie (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Sound Designer (*Rumors*), Music Director (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: Liz (*Women in Jeopardy!*), Ritter (*She Loves Me*), Jeanie (*Good People*), Madame Flo (*Souvenir*), Woody Guthrie's American Song, *Crimes of the Heart*, *Zombies from the Beyond*, *A Midnight Dreary*, Harvey, and *Man of La Mancha*; Sound Design (Scott Dixon's *Dracula: Prince of Blood*) **Other Credits:** music director, sound designer, freelance musician

Education: Proud graduate of Luther College with studies in music and theatre
"Living my role of a lifetime as a mother, with much love to our community for holding our family up." #TeamScottyForever

HAL CROPP (he/they)



Company Member
Since 1992

Producing Artistic Director

This Season: Arthur Vance (*The Outsider*), Ernie (*Rumors*)

Commonweal Highlights: favorite roles have been in *Ghostwriter*, *Dracula*, *Outside Mullingar*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Drawer Boy*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, *Christmas Carol*, *Groucho*, and *Talley's Folly*. Select directing credits include *Headspace Theatre*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Brand*, *Heartland Portrait*, *Wild Duck*, *Measure for Measure*, *Peer Gynt*, *Hedda Gabler*, *A Midnight Dreary*, *Enchanted April*, *Ghosts*, *Little Shop of Horrors* **Other Credits:** He was the Sally Irvine Award winner for Initiative (2006) and has served on the Lanesboro City Council, Economic Development Authority, and Chamber Board of Directors

Education: MFA National Theatre Conservatory; MBA Santa Clara University; AB Brown University

SARA HUESER (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2022

Props and Sound Designer/Properties Manager and IT Technician

This Season: Co-Props Design (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Sound Design (*The Outsider*), Props Design (*Rumors*, *Doubt*).

Commonweal Highlights: *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *Women in Jeopardy!*, *Deathtrap*, *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, *Alice in Winter Wonderland*, *Good People*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Leading Ladies* **Other Credits:** *The Other Place*, *My Way: A Frank Sinatra Tribute*, *The Wild Party*, *The Party*

Education: BCompSc, Pennsylvania College of Technology; BFA in Dramatic Writing at Savannah College of Art and Design

JACLYN JUNE JOHNSON (she/they)



Company Member
Since 2020

Actor/Director/Intimacy Director/Director of Production

This Season: Intimacy Director (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Paige (*The Outsider*), Director (*Rumors*).

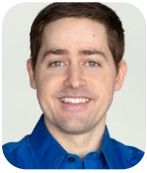
Commonweal Highlights: Elizabeth (*Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*), Director (*Deathtrap*, *Leading Ladies*), Margie (*Good People*), Alice Nutting (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) **Other Credits:** Jaclyn has performing, playwriting, directing, and designing credits with companies such as St. Croix Festival Theatre, Children's Theatre of Madison, Creede Repertory, Riverside Theatre, and Chicago's UTG Improv Theatre.

Education: BA, Cornell College

"I'd like to thank, for their loving encouragement: my family, friends, spouse, and our pets. And thank you for supporting the arts—specifically your support of the uniquely healing community of theatre."

THE COMPANY

JOSIAH LAUBENSTEIN (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2018

Actor/Sound Designer/Marketing Team Associate/Video Editor/Literary Manager

This Season: Sound Designer (*Ugly Lies the Bone* and *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*), Dave (*The Outsider*)

Commonweal Highlights: Georg (*She Loves Me*), Jack/Stephanie (*Leading Ladies*), Bernard (*Boeing Boeing*)

Education: MFA in Acting, University of South Carolina

"A very special thank you to my lovely wife, Rachel, and all the love in the world to my two children, Franny & Jude."

ISABELLA ANASTASIA LEIGH (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2023

Production Stage Manager/Administrative Team Associate

This Season: Rehearsal Stage Manager (*Ugly Lies the Bone*, *The Outsider*, *Rumors*, *Doubt*); Performance Stage Manager (*Rumors*); Intimacy Coordinator (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: Rehearsal Stage Manager (*She Loves Me* and *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*); Rehearsal/Performance Stage Manager (*Deathtrap*) **Other Credits:** stage management and directing with: Austin Shakespeare, Jarrott Productions, ScriptWorks (Austin, TX); Broom Street Theatre, Children's Theatre of Madison, Forward Theater, Music Theatre of Madison, and StageQ (Madison, WI)

Education: BA in Gender & Women's Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison
"Much love to my kitties: Rosalind, Beatrice, Mercutio, and Tybalt."

SYNTH MANUEL (they/them)



Company Member
Since 2023

Stage Manager/Dramaturg/Designer/Production Team Associate

This Season: Assistant Stage Manager/Props Design (*The Outsider*), Co-Scenic Design and Intimacy Coordinator (*Rumors*), Sound Design/Performance Stage Manager (*Doubt*); Stage Manager (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: *The Effect*, *She Loves Me*, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *Women in Jeopardy!* **Other Credits:** Quad City Area Credits include: director (*The God of Vengeance*); stage manager (*Cabaret*, *Ride the Cyclone*); assistant director (*The Threepenny Opera*, *The Mountaintop*); dramaturg at The Spotlight Theatre

Education: BA in Theatre History and Tech & Design, Augustana College
"All my love and gratitude to Isa, Eli, Clarke, and my wonderful family!"

JOHN B. NICOL (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2022

Actor/Assistant Stage Manager/Production & Administrative Associate

This Season: Assistant Stage Manager (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), A.C. Petersen (*The Outsider*), Co-Scenic Designer (*Doubt*), Arthur de Bourgh (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: Arpad Laszlo (*She Loves Me*), Michal (*The Pillowman*), Deputy/Nick Cricker II (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*)

Education: BS in Theatre Arts, Minnesota State University, Mankato

"Thank you to the people who hear, and further thanks for the people who listen."



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THE COMPANY

Laurie Roberts (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2022

Actor/Choreographer/Development Associate

This Season: Jess (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Chris (*Rumors*), Elizabeth (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*), Intimacy Coordinator (*The Outsider*)

Commonweal Highlights: Eight Shoppers (*She Loves Me*), Myra (*Deathtrap*), Assistant Director (*Bernhardt/Hamlet*), The Dutchess (*Alice in Winter Wonderland*), and Choreographer (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) **Other Credits:** Chicago credits from A Red Orchid Theatre, Facility Theatre, Hell in a Handbag, and Theatre Y. Cincinnati credits include Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Know Theatre, and Cincinnati Fringe Festival (recipient of the 2015 Producer's Pick.) Laurie has also worked as an acting teacher, movement director, and choreographer.

Education: MFA, University of South Carolina; BA, University of Washington
"Love to my husband, Cody, & the floof-babies: Duke Orsino & Meriadoc Brandybuck."

Jodi Rushing (they/she)



Company Member
Since 2019

Stage Manager/Front of House Supervisor

This Season: Assistant to Costume Designer (*Ugly Lies The Bone*, *Rumors*), Performance Stage Manager (*The Outsider*)

Commonweal Highlights: Performance Stage Manager (*Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*), Performance Stage Manager (*Good People*), Costume Design (*The Complete Work of William Shakespeare...*), Costume Designer (*I Love to Eat*), Assistant Stage Manager (*On the Verge*) **Other Credits:** Stage Manager (Doniphan Dance Project), Conference Manager (American College Dance Association - South); Makeup Artist (*The Wonder of the World...* currently in post production)

Education: BA in Theatre & Film, University of Mississippi

Tim Sailer (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2021
(plus 2009-2011)

Actor/Assistant Director of Marketing

This Season: Kelvin (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Ken (*Rumors*), dialect coach (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *She Loves Me*, *Leading Ladies*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Rainmaker* **Other Credits:** More than 50 roles across 35 plays at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA; Utah, Houston, and Texas Shakespeare Festivals; Park Square Theatre; Theater L'Homme Dieu; audiobook narrator

Education: MFA in Acting, University of Houston
"We must risk delight." – poet Jack Gilbert

Alex Schlesinger (they/them)



Company Member
Since 2021

Actor/Designer/Light & Sound Technician/Marketing Associate

This Season: Projection Design & Performance Stage Manager (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Lighting Design (*The Outsider*), Glenn (*Rumors*), Charles Bingley (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: Waiter (*She Loves Me*), Clifford (*Deathtrap*), Stevie (*Good People*), Nick Cricker/Durdles (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) **Other Credits:** Riff Raff (*The Rocky Horror Show*) at New Minowa Players in Decorah; Amos Hart (*Chicago*) at Luther College

Education: BA in Theatre, Luther College

"Thanks to my mentor, professor, and good friend Jeff Dintaman for his years of support and sharing of knowledge that got me to where I am today."

THE COMPANY

ADRIENNE SWEENEY (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2001

Actor/Associate Artistic Director/Director of External Communications

This Season: Louise (*The Outsider*), Cookie (*Rumors*), Props Design (*Christmas at Pemberley*)

Commonweal Highlights: Sarah Bernhardt (*Bernhardt/Hamlet*), *Women in Jeopardy!*, (*Berthe*) *Boeing Boeing*, *Sylvia*

Education: MFA in Acting, University of Arizona

"Thank you for choosing to be here."

JEREMY van METER (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2012

Actor/Director of Development

This Season: Ned (*The Outsider*), Father Flynn (*Doubt*)

Commonweal Highlights: *I Ought to Be in Pictures*, *Come Back*, *Dracula: Prince of Blood*, *Outside Mullingar*, *Brand*, *The Philadelphia Story* **Other Credits:** Barter Theatre Actor in Residence; Riverside Shakespeare Festival; Illinois Shakespeare Festival; Great River Shakespeare Festival; Caffeine Theatre (Chicago) Artistic Associate

Education: MFA in Acting from the University of Iowa

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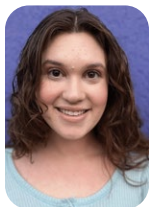
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MEET THE 2024–2025 APPRENTICE CLASS

The Commonwealth Theatre Company offers exciting 10-month apprenticeships intended to help young theatre artists transition into the professional world. Apprentices serve on either a performance or technical track. Additionally, they work alongside company members on the Marketing, Development, and Production teams. Because of this rare organizational model, Commonwealth apprentices experience the full scope of running a nonprofit theatre company. It culminates in a final capstone production which is chosen, designed, and performed by the apprentice company.



BRI ANGLE (she/her, acting apprentice) is thrilled to be joining the Commonwealth for her first season. Her favorite credits include Nan Carter in *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*; Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; #2 in *The Wolves*; and Agnes in *She Kills Monsters*. Bri is also a former member and co-director of the improv troupe Oddly Appropriate, and has enjoyed bringing fun and fake crime to events throughout Colorado with Murder Mystery USA and Odd Prop Productions. Bri is a graduate of Colorado Mesa University, where she earned her BFA in Acting/Directing.



DYLAN DELAGARDELLE (he/him, technical apprentice) is so excited to be part of the Commonwealth Apprentice program! Dylan is from West Des Moines, Iowa. He has served as stage manager many times for DMACC Ankeny Theater with shows such as *No Exit*, *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, and most recently *Head Over Heels*. Dylan is very excited to continue down his path of technical theater and learn the most he can during his time at the Commonwealth.



ANYA GOLOVKO (she/her, acting apprentice) is thrilled to join the Commonwealth Theatre for her first professional contract! Anya is an actor, choreographer, and technician from Houston, Texas. She has recently graduated from Waldorf University with a BA—double majoring in Musical Theatre and Theatre Performance. Some of her favorite roles include: *Bright Star* (Margo), *Addams Family* (Alice), *The Fantasticks* (Hucklebee), and *Checkout Girls* (Marge). Anya is a firm believer that every performer has to be well rounded in every capacity of theatre, and is thankful for the opportunity to share her work and love for theatre.

*Do you know a young theatre artist
who might be interested in our apprenticeships?*

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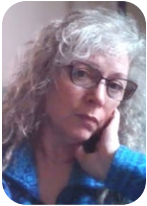
THIS PRODUCTION ALSO FEATURES...



GEORGIA DOOLITTLE (Lydia Wickham, she/they) spent this summer co-directing and acting as Sir Toby Belch in a backyard production of *Twelfth Night*. She is thrilled to be here for her first production at the Commonweal. Recently appearing as an understudy in *Alice in Wonderland* at the Children's Theatre and Ella in *Life Sucks* with Open Eye Theatre & Girl Friday Productions, she has also performed in *Antigonick* (Full Circle Theater Company); *Hairball! The Bigfoot Musical* (Open Eye), *Analog & Vinyl* (Minneapolis Musical Theatre), and assistant directed *Moscow, Moscow, Moscow* with Craig Johnson at the University of Minnesota.



CRAIG JOHNSON (director, he/him) is always delighted to be back at Commonweal Theatre Company, having directed numerous productions over the past twenty years including last season's *Women in Jeopardy!*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Boeing Boeing*, *Dracula: Prince of Blood*, and others. Craig is a Minneapolis director, actor, writer, and educator, and has worked at many Twin Cities theaters. Closer to Lanesboro, he has directed productions at Rochester Civic Theatre and Cedar Summerstock Theater in Osage, Iowa



JANIS MARTIN (Costume Designer, she/her) Since 1999 at Commonweal: *Doubt: A Parable*, *Alice in Winter Wonderland*, *Dracula: Prince of Blood*, *Silent Sky*, *Souvenir*, *Last Night of Ballyhoo*, *Drawer Boy*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Midnight Dreary*, plus 45 more shows. Locally: Theatre du Mississippi (*The Hired Girl Gets Married*); Saint Mary's University (*Bach at Leipzig*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Urinetown*, *Playboy of the Western World*— also seen at Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, Ireland); Viterbo University (*On the Verge*, *Spitfire Grill*, *Bliethe Spirit*, *Great Expectations*); and Mixed Blood (*Take Me Out*). Janis has created over 135 designs nationally; and taught at St. Mary's University, Luther College, Marshall University, and U.C. Santa Barbara.



KATHARINE SANFORD (Jane Bingley, she/her) is excited to join the Commonweal this season to make her professional acting debut. Katharine recently graduated from East 15 Acting School in England with her M.A. in Acting and is very happy to be returning to the Commonweal stage after attending their summer conservatory program as a high school student. Favorite past roles include Lily in *The Freedom of the City*, Maria in *Twelfth Night*, and Katherine in *The Taming*.



PETER WEBER (scenic designer, he/him) is happy to return to the Commonweal. He is looking forward to working with the friends he made last year on *She Loves Me*. Peter started in theatre out of high school as a stagehand. He moved on to become the summer stage manager at Festival Theatre while pursuing a B.A. in Studio Arts at Northland College in 2011. After a decade as Festival Theatre's Technical Director he left to start a construction LLC. This will be the second time working on *Christmas at Pemberley* though this time in scenic design and painting.



THOMAS WHITE (lighting designer, he/him) a Cedar Falls, IA resident and milkman at Hansen's Dairy, recently co-directed *Kinky Boots* at the Waterloo Community Playhouse alongside his husband Bryan, marking his directorial debut. Thomas earned a BA in technical theater from the University of Northern Iowa and is a founding member of Sissy's Circus, a burlesque troupe that pushes the boundaries of gender identity and sexuality through drag, dance, and theatre. Other professional credits include the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, the Telluride Film Festival and, of course, the Commonweal.

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY

by Lauren Gunderson
and Margot Melcon

DESIGNERS & SPECIALISTS

Director	Craig Johnson
Scenic Designer	Peter Weber
Costume Designer	Janis Martin
Lighting Designer	Thomas White
Props Designer	Adrienne Sweeney
Assistant to Props Designer	Sara Hueser
Music Director	Stela Burdt
Sound Designer	Josiah Laubenstein
Dialect Coach	Tim Sailer
Intimacy Coordinator	Isabella Anastasia Leigh
Stage Manager	Synth Manuel
Assistant Stage Managers	Dylan Delagardelle, Anya Golovko

CAST

MARY BENNET	Lizzy Andretta
ARTHUR de BOURGH	John B. Nicol
ELIZABETH DARCY	Laurie Roberts
FITZWILLIAM DARCY	Cody Beyer
JANE BINGLEY	Katharine Sanford
CHARLES BINGLEY	Alex Schlesinger
LYDIA WICKHAM	Georgia Doolittle
ANNE de BOURGH	Bri Angle

SETTING

December, 1815 at Pemberley, the grand estate of Mr. and Mrs. Darcy

There will be one 15-minute intermission.

Please see the front of house staff for the precise run time of each act.

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY was originally produced by Northlight Theatre, Chicago, Illinois (BJ Jones, Artistic Director; Timothy Evans, Executive Director).

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service collection. (www.dramatists.com)

PRODUCTION UNDERWRITER



PETERSON CREATIVE
PHOTOGRAPHY & DESIGN

PLAYWRIGHTS BIOS



LAUREN GUNDERSON has been one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015, topping the list thrice including 2022/23. She is a two-time winner of the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I and You* and *The Book of Will*, the winner of the William Inge Distinguished Achievement in Theatre Award, the Lanford Wilson Award and a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. She is a playwright, screenwriter, musical book writer and children's author who lives in San Francisco. She graduated from NYU Tisch as a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship.

MARGOT MELCON is an artist, arts administrator and writer and co-wrote the *Christmas at Pemberley* trilogy (*Miss Bennet*, *The Wickhams*, and *Georgiana and Kitty*) with Lauren Gunderson. She was the Director of New Play Development at Marin Theatre Company for seven years, where she dramaturged over 30 productions—including six world premieres—and administered the company's two annual new play prizes and commissioning program. She has developed plays with TheatreWorks, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Crowded Fire Theater, Shotgun Players, Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor, the Kennedy Center, the New Harmony Project, and The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis. She currently manages arts and culture grantmaking at the Zellerbach Family Foundation. Margot is a graduate of California State University, Chico, and lives in San Francisco with her family.



NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR



Miss Bennet reunites many of the beloved characters from Austen's novel, but focuses on the brainy, socially awkward middle sister, Mary Bennet. It's now two years after the novel and Mary has grown up. She longs for a "larger life" but circumstances and family relationships keep her hemmed in. This is the story of how people evolve. Mary struggles to redefine herself. Her oldest sister Jane will soon become a mother. Elizabeth is intent on making Pemberley a real home and making Christmas a new kind of holiday!

- How do we change over time?
- What roles do we step into?
- Are these made by choice or obligation?
- Who are the others in our lives that we see becoming different people?

The end of each calendar year gives us a chance to reflect on what's past and what's to come. What does the future hold for you?

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DRAMATURG'S NOTE

By SYNTH MANUEL

Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon came up with the idea for *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* on a road trip together in 2014. It is a show that is both practical—all theatre companies need good holiday shows—and different: it is rooted in the complications of being part of a family made up of dynamic women and what it means to support one another. It premiered in 2016 and has since become a popular holiday production in regional theaters across the United States.

Gunderson and Melcon took on a big responsibility in expanding the Jane Austen world, as this show is a sequel to the iconic novel *Pride and Prejudice*. You do not need to know the Bennet family lore in order to enjoy this wonderful holiday show, but if you're curious, here's what went down.

The novel centers around the Bennet family, particularly Elizabeth Bennet, the intelligent and witty second eldest daughter, and her evolving relationship with the wealthy and aloof Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. Set in early 19th-century England, the story explores themes of social class, marriage, morality, and misunderstandings.

The Bennet family has five daughters, and Mrs. Bennet is determined to marry them off to wealthy men to secure their futures. When the wealthy and eligible Mr. Bingley moves into the neighborhood, he quickly becomes smitten with the eldest Bennet daughter, Jane. At the same time, Mr. Darcy, Bingley's reserved and seemingly proud friend, initially snubs Elizabeth, leading her to form a negative opinion of him.

Elizabeth is further prejudiced against Darcy when she hears rumors about his mistreatment of George Wickham, a charming but unethical officer. As the story progresses, Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, but she rejects him due to her misconceptions about his character. However, Darcy later proves his true nature by helping Elizabeth's family in a time of crisis and revealing the truth about Wickham's deceit.

Through a series of misunderstandings and revelations, Elizabeth comes to recognize Darcy's integrity and kindness, while Darcy learns to overcome his pride. In the end, Elizabeth and Darcy fall in love and marry, as do Jane and Bingley.



Pride and Prejudice illustration by Charles Edmund Brock (1895)

SPECIAL THANKS

The Commonweal is grateful for a generous anonymous donation in sponsorship of the entire 2024 season. Special thanks also to Heidi & Phil Dybing, Louanne Hamann, James Shoop, Festival Theatre, Lifetime Eye Care of Preston, Luther College, St. Mary's University, and Viterbo University.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas is often celebrated as the most wonderful time of the year, filled with gift-giving, advent calendars, caroling, and festive decorations like trees, garlands, and wreaths. Its history is long and varied, with the first recorded mention of Christmas dating back to the 2nd century. Christmas traditions, both new and old, converged in early 19th-century England, as seen in *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*.

In 17th-century England, Puritans condemned Christmas, viewing it as a Catholic invention. The holiday was even banned in 1647 following the English Civil War but restored in 1660. By the 19th century, authors like Charles Dickens helped shape Christmas into the family-centered, charitable holiday we recognize today. His works, along with the Oxford Movement in the Church of England, popularized Christmas services and the spirit of generosity.

The introduction of the Christmas tree came to Britain via Queen Charlotte in the early 1800s, later popularized by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, spreading throughout the country by 1841.



Christmas tree at Windsor Castle from The Illustrated London News Christmas supplement (1848)

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THE AUSTEN FANDOM

There have been numerous film and TV adaptations of Jane Austen's work, especially *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. But the Austen fandom goes much further than this. There is a pattern of modern women being placed in a Jane Austen world like the TV show *Lost in Austen* and *Austenland*. There are also movies like *Clueless* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* that take the main plots of Jane Austen novels and translate them to modern times. These few examples do not even scratch the surface of all the Austen adaptations and fanfictions out there. What is the enduring appeal of Jane Austen's works? On the Fandom.com website, where fans can fill out their own research on any fandom you can think of, fans have stated that "Her realism, biting irony, and social commentary have gained her historical importance among scholars and critics."

Austen's work offers keen insights into human nature, timeless themes, and skillful storytelling, which resonates across generations. Her novels explore themes that are as relevant today as they were in her time, such as love, marriage, social status, and personal growth. Her focus on individual desires versus societal expectations creates a tension that readers across different eras can relate to.



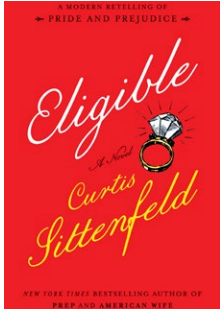
A portrait of Jane Austen by her sister Cassandra



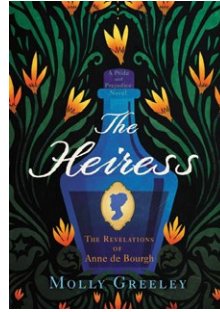
Chatsworth House is a stately home in the Derbyshire Dales in England. It is believed to be the inspiration for Darcy's Pemberley.

THE *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* “EXPANDED UNIVERSE”

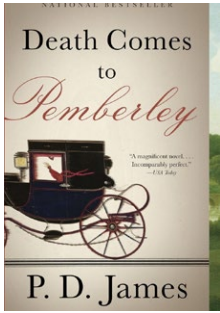
Because the works of Jane Austen are in the public domain, anyone may freely use Austen’s characters and stories to write their own adaptations, sequels, spin-offs, and more. (*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, anyone?) Here’s a tiny glimpse of other books within the world of *Pride and Prejudice*. Do you know about any others?



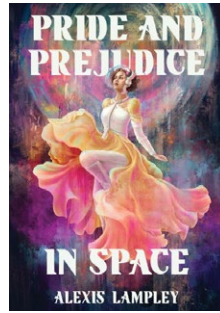
Eligible
by Curtis Sittenfeld
A modern retelling with Lizzy as a magazine writer in New York and Darcy as a neurosurgeon.



The Heiress: The Revelations of Anne de Bourgh
by Molly Greeley
A Gothic reimagining of the life of the mysterious Anne de Bourgh.



Death Comes to Pemberley
by P.D. James
The estate is all set for an annual autumn ball, but after a shocking death, Pemberley plunges into a frightening mystery.



Pride and Prejudice in Space
by Alexis Lampley
Join the Bennet sisters within the Londinium Lunar System in this new adaptation—with a host of colorful graphics and illustrations.

THE CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY TRILOGY

Playwrights Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon have written two other holiday stories set in the world of *Pride and Prejudice*.

THE WICKHAMS

Taking place at the same time as *Miss Bennet*, audiences get a peek at the goings-on downstairs at Pemberley, where the servants are bustling about. But their work is interrupted by the midnight arrival of the definitely not invited Mr. Wickham—Lydia’s rogue of a husband and Mr. Darcy’s sworn enemy. It’s a charming holiday tale that explores the confines of class and the generosity of forgiveness.

GEORGIANA AND KITTY

Georgiana (Mr. Darcy’s younger sister) and Kitty (the youngest of the Bennet siblings) are the best of friends and ready for their own adventures in life and love—starting with the arrival of an admirer and secret correspondent. Meddlesome families and outmoded expectations won’t stop these determined friends from forging their own way in a holiday tale filled with music, ambition, and sisterhood.



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"When the MDC was initiated, we immediately joined. This level of giving helps ensure a solid financial base for the organization to meet their annual expenses while planning for the future. We encourage you to join us in supporting the Commonwealth, so we all can continue to enjoy the wonderful productions we have come to treasure."

— Jon & Mary Hart
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