

Hartford Stage, Hartford, CT

*Pride and Prejudice*, by Kate Hamill based on the novel by Jane Austen.

Directed by Tatyana-Marie Carlo.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

**“Tonight’s the night.”**

Modern idioms abound in Kate Hamill’s edition of Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice.” Every time someone speaks another familiar and easy phrase fills the theatre and double entendres Austen never conceived of populate the speeches in between the modernist idioms. Though physically set in Austen’s time period, visually, the oral utterances of the four Bennet girls, their parents and their acquaintances bring the play into modern times. Even the dances, lights and music dwell in the era of the clubs that gave us ABBA and Donna Summer. It’s an interesting point of view that director Tatyana-Marie Carlo has taken with Hamill’s script and the final effect, on stage at Hartford Stage, is hilarious and commanding. This is a new “Pride” with prejudice confined to the plot.



The Company, Photo: T. Charles Erickson

Mr. Darcy, played by Carman Lacivita, is still the stuffy, snobbish aristocratic S.O.B. he has always been. Mr. Bingley, played by Sergio Mauritz Ang is still the romantic, swayable young man he should always be. Lizzie Bennet as played by Renata Eastlick is still haughty, opinionated and filled with the grandeur young woman that decision-makers often become. Her younger sister Jane, the lovely Maria Gabriela Gonzalez, is the ever-romantic, giddy girl Austen wrote her to be. Their mother, the overbearing Mrs. Bennet is played with gusto and gumption by Lana Young. The rest of the characters are exactly who they should be in this production and it is only the modern idiom that makes them different from

Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier, from Hermione Gingold and Polly Bergen, from everyone who has come before to portray these people.



Madeleine Barker, Carman Lacivita;  
Photo: T. Charles Erickson

fare-thee-well.

But no matter who else they play, the Bennet sisters are always at the center of the story. Eastlick is always Lizzie and Lacivita is always Darcy. And surprisingly Lana Young is always Mrs. Bennet. She has what may be the toughest role in the play. She races from room to room ringing bells and swatting newspapers and confronting her reluctant daughters and their suitors. She does all of this with an almost comic genius. Her work is exemplary and I found I missed her when she was off-stage for a while.

The sets designed by Sara Brown gave the play its many locations without making many actual changes and the concept worked wonderfully. The show's costumes, designed by Haydee Zelideth, kept the show visually

I've never looked at this work as a ribald comedy but that is what the author and director have given us in this production. Fortunately, the actors are up to the challenge. They are not alone in this. Choreographer Shura Baryshnikov has combined the stature of 19<sup>th</sup> century dance with the popular movement of the 1970s and 2000s to bridge the visuals of people in the agonies of new relationships. Daniel Baker & Co. created the special music of this fictional period and with Emma Deane's spirited lighting the whole thing comes together brilliantly.

Mos of the cast double in other roles. Anne Scurria makes a total hit as Mr. Bennet and then turns around and plays Charlotte Lucas, a girl who marries Lizzie's swain, Mr. Wickham. She does a grand job in both parts. Zoë Kim is fine as the truculent Lydia Bennet and then becomes the grand and intrusive Lady Catherine De Bourgh. Her daughter Anne is played by Maria Gabriela Gonzalez as a gruff, non-verbal grumbling and growling grouch and, unlike her beautiful Jane Bennet she is really scary to watch. Madeleine Barker portrays the youthful Mary, destined to run away with Ang's Mr. Collins and his Mr. Bingley is the ever-popular romantic Gonzalez's Jane to a



Zoë Kim, Madeline Barker, Lana Young,  
Renata Eastlick; Photo: T. Charles Erickson



in its real period but moved with a sense of dance that made them suddenly modern. There was nothing stiff about them. Earon Nealey used excellent wigs to keep each character identifiable and Daniel Baker & Co's sound design worked very well.



Renata Eastlick; Photo: T. Charles Erickson.

At the bottom of this complex puzzle of people on the verge of nervous breakdowns is Lizzie. This is, once and for all, her story. Renata Eastlick has the enormous task of holding the whole thing together and making it believable. Working against the negatives in the script Eastlick makes her Lizzie into a likeable character who grabs our sympathy even as she denounces the very human impulses of love and admiration. We rarely see her vulnerability and when we finally do come to it, it is a welcome alteration of Lizzie's whole personality. Eastlick makes her believable and that's a personal triumph in a script that puts silliness over humanity.

You won't come too close to the romantic notions of Jane Austen in Kate Hamill's version of the story, but you will come away understanding, in contemporary terms, the four sisters and their parents and what drives them all to do what they do, to

seek what they seek. It's a worthwhile journey to take.

+ 10/22/2023 +

**Pride and Prejudice** runs at Hartford Stage, 50 Church Street, Hartford, CT through November 5. For information and tickets call 860-527-5151 or go to [Hartfordstage.org](http://Hartfordstage.org).