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## Stage review: 'Pride and Prejudice' frolics anew at Public Theater



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Jane Austen, living under the thumb of 19th-century British patriarchy, spent several novels bringing the snobby aristocracy and prideful know-it-all down a peg.

Like-minded Kate Hamill, from a 21st-century perch, has seized on works such as Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," deconstructing the text for the stage and infusing it with elements of a cross-dressing vaudeville and the irreverence of a "Saturday Night Live" sketch.

It follows that Ms. Hamill's reinvention of "Pride and

'Pride and Prejudice'

the year’s most-produced plays in regional theaters. The adaptation upholds the ever-popular title, plot and Austen’s own words, to a point. This is not for the faint-hearted purist.

Tuesday; 8 p.m. Wednesday-Friday; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday; and 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays (2 p.m. only Oct. 28).

**Tickets:** \$30-\$80, \$16.50 for students and age 26 and younger, 412-315-1600 or ppt.org.

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The “Pride” now showing at the O’Reilly Theater cranks up the volume for a raucous two hours that’s both battle of the sexes and irreverent takedown of the walls that separate social classes. The decibel level hits the “shrill” mark a bit too often, yet director Desdemona Chiang and her cast also do Austen proud.

Lines land with the sting of their original intent and ring true in the present tense. And we root for the inevitable couples to, for heaven’s sake, throw propriety to the wind and say what they mean.

Most actors in the cast of eight play at least two characters, with the serious and the silly separated often by infuriating restraint on the one hand and that grating shrillness on the other.

Chris Richards is a prime example of mastering two distinct characters — the wily Wickham, and the overbearing Mr. Collins, an ambitious, wife-seeking rector who takes annoying to new heights.



These are among the men who get caught in the orbit of the Bennet family and the outrageous Mrs. Bennet (Elena Alexandratos), a mother hellbent on making wealthy matches for her daughters, particularly the two oldest, Lizzie (Simone Recasner) and Jane (Ashley Bufkin).

Lizzie, however, is determined to fight the system and never marry, and Ms. Recasner plays her as the most shocked of anyone to find that she could be wrong about her beliefs. Ms. Bufkin's kindly Jane, "the pretty one," dances through life until she meets the charmingly goofy Mr. Bingley (Andrew William Smith, who also dons a bonnet and frock as Jane's sister, Mary).

The ball that entwines the destinies of Jane and Mr. Bingley would seem to do the opposite for Lizzie and the dour, dashing Mr. Darcy (Ryan Garbayo) — for her, it's disdain at first sight.

Recent Point Park University grad Emma Mercier, meanwhile, doubles as the unpleasant Lady Catherine and as Lydia, the youngest and nearly loudest Bennet sister. That high volume mark goes to Mr. Smith, who plays Mary's gross habits to such extremes as to be unbearable at times. He is, however, delightful as the lovestruck Mr. Bingley, who finds his destiny when he sets his sights on the enchanting Jane.

The play opens with cast members all in white, tossing a red ball — a game of catch? Hot potato? Costume changes then come with occasional frequency, often onstage, as the women artfully go from

navigated by Mr. Smith and Ashton Heyl as both Mr. Bennet and Lizzie’s friend Charlotte.

To allow this “Pride and Prejudice” to toggle its roots and modern-day sensibilities, the design team — Narelle Sissons (scenery), Christine Tschirgi (costumes), Masha Tsimring (lighting) and Andre Pluess (music and sound) — has reimagined the O’Reilly Theater. Normally a thrust stage, it is transformed into an alley that does double duty as a ballroom and grand or humble houses.

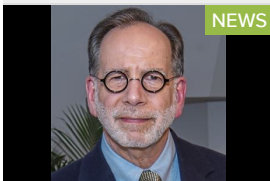
High above the action, chandeliers hung with streamers are more representations than grand fixtures, while scenes and even some scenery reach to the rear seats. It’s an O’Reilly open to new possibilities, a reflection of the play and playwright Hamill, who also has mined Austen’s “Sense and Sensibilities” and William Thackeray’s “Vanity Fair” with comic flair and a knack for reawakening the timeless resonance in another writer’s words.

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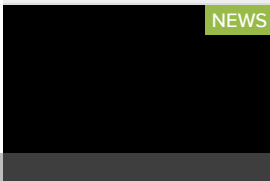
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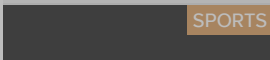
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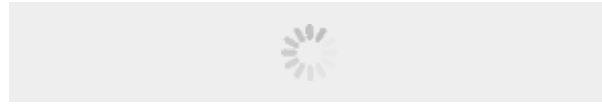
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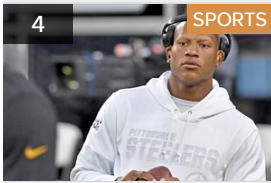
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**What is strawberry-pretzel jello salad?**

- A jello dessert
- A jello salad
- A sweet and savory summer salad
- Whatever it is, it's delicious
- Whatever it is, it's terrible
- I've never heard of this food before
- Other / No opinion

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