



We are all fools in love – a review of “Pride and Prejudice”

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By Michael “Buzz” Buzzelli, ‘Burgh Vivant

When headstrong Elizabeth “Lizzy” Bennet (Simone Recasner) meets the dashing but prideful Mr. Darcy (Ryan Garbayo), sparks and witty bon mots fly in Kate Hamill’s spirited adaptation of Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice.”

If you haven’t read the book or seen the nine million movie versions, here’s a brief rundown:

Lizzie’s meddling mother, Mrs. Bennet (Elena Alexandratos), is determined to marry off her four daughters; Jane (Ashley Bufkin), the aforementioned Lizzy (Recasner), Mary (Andrew William Smith) and Lydia (Emma Mercier) much to the chagrin of her husband Mr. Bennet (Ashton Heyl).

Side note: Catherine “Kitty” Bennet gets the Zeppo treatment. She has been streamlined out of the play, but, like the extra Marx Brother, you really won’t miss her.

At a ball in Netherfield (that sounds naughty), Jane meets Mr. Bingley (Andrew William Smith in a dual role) and falls head over heels. Meanwhile, Lizzy bumps into Mr. Darcy. It’s the big meet-cute, but Lizzy and Darcy don’t mix well. Their first meeting is kinda like vinegar and baking soda – volcanic.

Meanwhile, Mother Bennet keeps scheming. She has a plan to marry Lizzy off to her cousin the vexatious Mr. Collins (Chris Richards in three dynamically different roles). The insufferable lout is destined to inherit the Bennet property.

Side note: In Victorian England, women were ineligible to hold on to the family home after the father passed – see every episode of “Downton Abbey.”

After Lizzy rejects Mr. Collins, he proposes to her best friend Charlotte (Heyl also in a dual role). Mrs. Bennet has the mother of all hissy fits and practically disowns Lizzy over her disdain of the pending suitors.

Then, the Jane/Bingley romance hits a snag. Lizzy keeps colliding with Darcy. Plotlines tangle up like silly string. As another English author once said, “The course of true love ne’er did run smooth.” But, luckily, it all ends pleasantly.

P.S. Thank Dionysus! There are no zombies in this version.



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Lizzy (Simone Recasner) agrees to dance with Mr. Darcy (Ryan Garbayo)
Photo credit: Michael Henninger

Hamill climbs up Barlow’s “39 Steps,” taking the adaptation in a fresh, new direction. There are a lot of dual roles, and this “Pride and Prejudice” relies heavier on farce than other iterations of the classic novel. It’s not a full-on parody, but it’s a broader, sillier take on the tale. Purists will cringe, but it’s a very accessible version of the world’s first rom-com.

Recasner has all the requisite charm and spunk of Lizzy Bennet. She is perfectly cast. Lizzy is the sun and everything in the show revolves around her. Luckily, Recasner shines brightly.

Firth fans beware! There's a new Mr. Darcy in town. Garbayo is a strikingly handsome romantic lead. He's a third less stuffy than the previous interpretations. To say, "He's quite good," would be a high compliment in Mr. Darcy's parlance.

Bufkin's Jane is a beauty, worthy of the platitudes heaped upon her. She does fine work as Jane. In a more comedic role, Bufkin hides under a veil and speaks gibberish as Miss Anne De Bourgh.

Smith's dual roles are both comedic. His Bingley is giant puppy dog of a man, complete with bouncing red ball. Mary's dialogue is a dour, pendantic yet hilarious when delivered by the tall, masculine man in a nightgown. It's a departure for the actor, but Smith handles it with aplomb.

Richards buries himself each of his three disparate characters. Study the program carefully – you won't believe it.

The entire cast bounces around in their various roles. They are all terrific. Some roles are so completely over the top and ridiculous it's a little grating. A little more subtlety could really make this production astounding.

Desdemona Chiang directs the action at a frenetic pace. It's fairly manic for an English drawing room romance. While it gets preposterous in the first act, the second act is perfect. Chiang tones down the zaniness, but ratchets up the story's emotional resonance. Austen's storylines take a more serious turn. Cute little Lydia gets the short end of the stick in the novel and in the play.

The actors traipse about on a whimsical set designed by Narelle Sissons. It's a bright, colorful set that uses the O'Reilly in new and exciting ways.

"Pride and Prejudice" is a broad, silly farce, but it still carries visceral emotional power when Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy FINALLY proclaim their love for one another, and that love, friends, is what "Pride and Prejudice" is all about.

– MB

You can catch "Pride and Prejudice" at the O'Reilly Theater, 621 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222. For more information, click [here < https://ppt.org/>](https://ppt.org/).

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