“At Fort Mason Center on Friday night, Sept. 23, the opening of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, THE MUSICAL was greeted with grateful applause. That’s because everyone loves the story; because the songs were tuneful and hummable; because Rita Abrams’ lyrics rhymed hypothesize with philosophize, morose with comatose, and esoteric with hysteric.”

—Leah Garchik, San Francisco Chronicle

“... The songs are often funny and occasionally surprisingly bawdy. Brown’s adaptation conveys the gist of the (novel) fairly and effectively, and gives some sense of Austen’s sly humor, accentuated by the more whimsical drollery of the musical numbers. In true romantic comedy fashion, these elements initially seem like an odd match but gradually come together into what feels almost like a natural pair.”

—Marin Independent Journal
“Rita Abrams’ songs are compelling, delightful, and in the case of the ballads, moving.

The book by Josie Brown captures the period of Jane Austen’s world in words. It is a witty, tuneful, and sophisticated show.”

—Talkin’ Broadway

"PRIDE AND PREJUDICE — THE MUSICAL is funny and inviting right from the title. It is a pleasure and much more from beginning to end.

So many things to admire, from the wit, bite and insouciance of Rita Abrams' lyrics to her command of the musical forms that make the piece take wing and soar. The gorgeous Changing World ensemble (and then the differently shaded reprise) were especially fine.

The song, Being Married, is a dry martini of double meaning. The production’s wonderfully, darkly charismatic Darcy (David Crane) won the night with his showstopper delivery of his moving torch-song ballad. The transporting final chorus brought the garden-growing end of Bernstein’s Candide to mind. And plenty of other delights along the way.”

—Steven Winn, former theatre critic, San Francisco Chronicle
If you are an admirer of Jane Austen’s fiction, and have a soft spot for the more traditional style of American musicals than most of what has been generated on and off-Broadway in the past few decades, then you ought to hop in your car, page an Uber or engage whatever mode of transport you prefer, and head over to Fort Mason Center on the San Francisco waterfront.

There, ensconced in what used to be the Magic Theatre’s venue, the Southside Theater, you’ll find Independent Actors of Marin’s (IAM) delightful production of *Pride and Prejudice—The Musical*. Be forewarned, however: You better hurry, because this staged version of Austen’s most beloved novel, which debuted in London in 2012, is scheduled to end its American premiere run on Sunday, October 9th. Given the uncertainties that face such projects, who knows when, or where, it will turn up next.

The show is about as close to a perfect package of script, music directing, performers and overall production quality as one could realistically expect from a low-budget, non-professional company. Beyond that, the energy and talent of its mostly youthful cast give it a freshness that is often lacking in more lavish treatments.

All three of its creators are women (a rarity in itself). Rita Abrams (score, lyrics, musical direction) gained national recognition (including a pair of Emmy Awards) for her hit recording of “Mill Valley,” performed by a children’s chorus. In later years, she has collaborated on a number of well-received satirical revues that explore the prickly nature of male/female relationships. Josie Brown (book), is a popular writer of novels. Director Lexie Papedo Gasparini is an experienced professional actress.

To their immense credit, these three have managed to pull off the difficult task of fashioning a musical treatment of a famous literary milestone that, although modern in form, carefully preserves the vision of the original source.

To repeat: from top to bottom, it is an outstanding whole package.

Future potential producers: take notice.
Leslie Katz, San Francisco Examiner

“Fans of the Jane Austen classic likely will be pleased with the charming adaptation by Bay Area-based Rita Abrams (music, lyrics) and Josie Brown (book) onstage in its North American premiere at Fort Mason in The City.

It is presented by IAM Theatre, a Marin community troupe whose players skillfully articulate the novel’s early 19th century mores and morals, and lively, dense verbiage, which the writers lovingly retain.

It’s truly an ensemble piece, from the funny opening Welcome to Our Neighborhood (which introduces the five unmarried Bennet sisters with the amusing invitation, “It would be our greatest gift if we / could facilitate your felicity — especially if you’re as wealthy as you look, sir”) to the sentimental closing I Wish You Joy! (One fan in the audience even teared up at the inevitable unions between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy and Jane and Mr. Bingley.)

Kathy Deichen and Geoffrey Colton play the beleaguered Bennet parents with fine humor, and Chris Maltby and Juliet Heller display comic chops at Bennet associates Mr. and Mrs. Collins, as does Sandi Rubay as the haughty Lady Catherine.

Lizzy Moss is a lovely Jane, to Kodo Elder-Groebe’s affable Charles Bingley, and Kim Long gets her digs in as Bingley’s sister Caroline.

The show’s biggest drama comes in a power ballad by David Crane as Darcy (after he’s rejected by Elizabeth), and Brittany Law as Elizabeth, as she comes to terms with her complicated feelings toward Darcy.”
“An exceptional evening of song and romance, capturing the playfulness of Jane Austen’s story while reimagining it as a lively musical. This lighthearted romp into Regency England features jaunty tunes, lyric-packed songs, and an enthusiastic cast.”

Streamlined set backdrops roll in and out, transforming the stage between manor houses and country lanes, augmented by lovely pieces of vintage furniture.

Using the flow of Jane Austen’s wit, Josie Brown’s book is excellent.

To borrow a Regency phrase, it is excessively diverting.”

—Imagination Lane

Fort Mason Center’s musical adaptation of the beloved story highlights everything that gives PRIDE AND PREJUDICE its timeless appeal, from its wicked sense of humor to the irresistible charm of its characters—while also throwing in some dazzling song and dance numbers in the mix.

The sparkling wit of Elizabeth Bennet and the handsome but haughty Mr. Darcy try to overcome their pride and prejudice to find happiness together despite the rigid social rules of Regency England.

Featuring music and lyrics by Emmy award-winning composer Rita Abrams (“I Want it All Now”) this stunning musical will leave you starry-eyed and humming all the way home.”

—EventSeeker.com
“The Southside Theater uses the room across from the Magic Theatre in Fort Mason. Acoustics and sightlines are good. This is important for Rita Abrams and Josie Brown's adaptation of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, THE MUSICAL, which features a seventeen-person ensemble under Lexie Papedo Gasparini’s direction. There isn’t a lot of space on that stage for all those people so every movement counts. Somehow, they manage to pull it off.

In some ways it feels like a local theater production, where production and casting decisions are limited. But in other ways this production is the equal of others with far greater resources.

The cast is excellent and there are standout performers in the principal as well as non-principal roles, including Brittany Law as Elizabeth Bennet, David Crane as Mr. Darcy, Lizzy Moss as Jane Bennet, and Fernando Siu as Mr. Wickham. Poor Mr. Wickham only gets one number but could probably use more.

(This musical) is a lot simpler with less psychodrama than the original Jane Austen novel. For this and for an enjoyable night at the theater, we thank Josie Brown and Rita Abrams.

Ms. Abrams writes clever lyrics with simple melodies. We especially enjoyed Five Daughters, A Husband, and The One Who I Will Be with You. The songs are catchy and we exit the theater singing."

—SF Theater Blog

★★★★★

“Rita Abrams’ PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: Sheer delight!”

For All Events
“Another show that is getting national attention is *Pride & Prejudice – The Musical*.

The show, from Mill Valley’s IAM Theatre group, also ends soon, playing through Oct. 9 at San Francisco’s Southside Theatre at Fort Mason.

Besides running to get tickets, this show is noteworthy as this is a national premiere of a show written by Bay Area’s own Josie Brown (book) and Rita Abrams (music and lyrics).

The Jane Austen novel has had many film incarnations but rarely as a live musical, with this production debuting in London, and finally coming home to the Bay Area.

The show with its simplistic but well designed sets and costumes has some really great melodies and some memorable songs that make this a show to seek out when it (hopefully) makes a return engagements, and perhaps a deserved production in New York.

The songs, which I am still humming, not only are catchy and wonderful, but they do a great job at advancing the plot and story, in particular the first act’s “Five Daughters,” paints a great portrait of the Bennet family and the second act’s “That Would Be Me,” puts Lady Catherine on her own pedestal in the matter of three minutes.

David Crane as Mr. Darcy is spot on with his regal accent and captivates us even more when he sings. His beautiful and strong voice is a true find.

Brittany Law’s Elizabeth would make her onstage parents Geoffrey Colton and Kathy Deichen proud – and all three are harmonious and memorable, while helping to elevate the already wonderful story, and its excellent songs.

While this doesn’t affect the review in any way, it is noteworthy that the creative forces behind the show are all women (much like Broadway’s “Waitress.”)

Besides Austen being a female and the show’s book and songs by women, it’s directed by Lexie Papedo Gasparini and produced by Kathy Deichen, and women are also its musical director (Rita Abram) and choreographer (Nicole Helfer).

Hoping the show will stay around or go on tour, but just in case, get tickets now.”

—*Progressive Pulse*
"Abrams and Brown are to be commended for their faithfulness to Jane Austen’s text keeping the plot line intact with lyrics that complement the story and instill much needed humor to palliate the oppressive mores of its time.

It is an auspicious and ambitious beginning with the 17-member cast in full 18th Century costumes that is carried through the entire evening, sharing the text and dancing with songs that range from music hall ditties to romantic ballads and even a show stopping tango. Abrams’ lyrics are often a joy to hear.

The construction of the play, the marvelous plethora of songs, and the descriptive social mores found in Jane Austen’s novels create a potentially successful professional stage life. To steal a quote, 'This musical has legs'."

—For All Events

★★★★★

“The entire cast is a delight, as it is excellently directed by Lexie Papedo Gasparini. But it is Rita Abrams who deserves much of the credit, for she wrote the catchy music and clever lyrics.”

—Tiburon Ark
Pride and Prejudice
like never before...

In a coup for amateur dramatics, Ruislip Operatic Society is the first to stage Pride and Prejudice: The Musical, penned by an Emmy winner. ALAN HAYES wonders whether Jane Austen’s classic romance can ever, really, be sung.

R

Ruislip Operatic Society booked some big fish with the world premiere of Pride and Prejudice: The Musical, and its impressively CV-ed American writers. Did it manage to land this prestigious catch? Just about.

Jane Austen’s tale of manners, marriage and money has been filmed and staged splendidly, but sung? Only, apparently, as a couple of long ago and long-forgotten frogs.

Could the cast perhaps early 19th-century English society, with all its repressed emotions and straight faces, while delivering a show required to take a sideways, humorous look at those very things in order to entertain?

RCA’s challenge, and as a company with a great depth of talent it was always going to give its American guests a run for their money. "P&P" looked good and, at times, soundly great, directed by Helen Bailey, with Robert Wicks as musical director and the story by Josie Brown.

The plot, based on Austen’s 1813 romantic novel, follows the Bennets’ five daughters and their long-suffering parents. Mother wants them all married off; father just wants a quiet life. "Beware the cads, and they will fill breeches — you know the score!"

Along comes the cool, prideful Mr Darcy, and after mishap and misunderstanding, he eventually wins her, and his money, of course. Darcy (Matthew Ralph) was a strong leading man, stiffly formal as the role requires and powerful in the voice.

Bessie Wise’s Elizabeth was neatlyLexised, and although playing a woman of greater age, she managed to convince in the moments when she needed to be the dominant sister.

The characterisation that belies the era sometimes led to a rather static stage when performers were isolated. Crowd scenes worked well, duets and small group numbers were fine, but some of the singing was a little planted, a notable exception being the wonderful Angela Evans as Lady Catherine De Bourgh, the standard performance of the night.

Perhaps there was a little too much to grapple with? Rita Abrams’ scripts are hellishly clever, sassy American showtune stuff that puns on Austen and Dickens, alliterates and rhymes in staccato.

The double Emmy-award-winning writer has composed some very catchy numbers, some that could go on to be great.

"Ok, it’s too long — all about two hours and 45 minutes it could do with a simple cut — and the sets, while lovely, took an awful lot of changing, which snapped the momentum.

But the clever blending of ballad, ditty, chorus and solo, pathos and precision made for an enjoyable evening. Peter O’Regan gets laughs for his mincing minister Mr Collins, and showed excellent acting while-singing skills.

Pam Bailey was a fine, frustrated Mrs Bennet, and Caroline Clarke played a powerful Elizabeth in the role of Jane Bennet. Their humorous duet, A Husband, was one of the highlights of the night.

The newly refurbished Winston Churchill Hall in Ruislip was a fitting venue for a world first, and RCA did not disappoint — worthy producers of the premiere of a show which the two writers hope will go on to greater things.

Cold Court School in Barnet was an obvious choice as the WCI when, in 1969, two likely lads by the name of Lloyd Webber and Rice were commissioned to write a school production about a young, Jewish boy and his coat of many colours. Whatever happened to that, I wonder?

Pride and Prejudice: The Musical and Ruislip Operatic Society — hope you saw it here first, folks.

Turn to page 64 for a profile of co-writer Rita Abrams.

 profile

An American in Ruislip for a world premiere

EMMY award winner Rita Abrams, one half of the writing team behind Pride and Prejudice: The Musical, could not be happier that Britain — and Ruislip Operatic Society in particular — got to stage her Austen musical first.

She does, however, admit she had to look Ruislip up on a map from her home in Mill Valley, northern California, when her agent called to tell her that a director in the UK had come knocking.

"It did seem that being the UK it was very synchronicous to have the premiere here," she said. "To have the world premiere here is very exciting."

"Our agent (shared with co-author Josie Brown, below) approached us very logically when (director) Helen Bailey emailed us and left it very much in our hands."

Ruislip Operatic Society veteran director Bailey had been looking frantically for a winter show after her first choice had been scrapped.

Mass emails, frantic calls and some fast reworking later, the deal was done and "P&P" was on its way across the Atlantic.

"We had to get all the materials prepared very quickly and get them to them," said Abrams, a former primary school teacher whose life took a completely new direction when a song she wrote for her class back in 1969, in the town in which she still lives, was picked up by a Warner Bros music producer. It became a hit.

Forty-three years of musical theatre, children’s music, and film and TV soundtracks later, she said she was “reading Pride and Prejudice for the umpteenth time (when) I was struck that the story really should be a musical”.

Up stepped Josie Brown, a nearish neighbour from the San Francisco bay area, whose husband had collaborated with Abrams on another project, Pride and Prejudice: The Musical, like a blushing debutante, was ready to show a little ankle. And the London season beckoned.

"It’s like having a child to give it up for adoption, then coming across the world to see how it is getting on," Abrams said. "Last night (Wednesday last week, the second night of the run), I was sitting there watching it and for the first time I could relax and have confidence. I was very nervous before the first performance."

Rita Abrams is still loving the Ruislip life, last week enjoying walks around the neighbourhood between performances at The Winston Churchill Hall and the friendly welcome from local people. She is now hoping to take in a West End show or two.

P&P will go on to greater things, of that she is confident. It needs tweaking and fine-tuning, but Abrams is grateful for the chance to "lab test" it, and says there is no reason why a British company should not be second and even third in line to give it a try, and she is open to offers.

For Ruislip Operatic Society, if nothing else, it ensures them there place in musical theatre history.

Alan Hayes
To download a PDF of the songs, click here.

To hear it on our public website and see video excerpts, click here:
website: http://www.prideandprejudicemusical.com

REPRESENTATION

Theatre producers are welcome to visit our website for
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