

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2018 -19 SEASON

PLAYGUIDE

NOV 28 – DEC 23

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY

BY Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon
DIRECTED BY Sean Daniels
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR Bridget Kathleen O'Leary

Q&A WITH
MARGOT MELCON

JANE AUSTEN;
THE NOVELIST

THE REGENCY ERA

O CHRISTMAS TREE

SEAN DANIELS
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



BONNIE J. BUTKAS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY

BY LAUREN GUNDERSON AND MARGOT MELCON

FEATURING

ALEXIS BRONKOVIC
VICTORIA GRACE

VICHET CHUM[^]
KATIE GRINDELAND

AMANDA COLLINS
JESSE HINSON

VERONIKA DUERR[^]
SHAWN K. JAIN

SCENIC DESIGNER
JAMES J. FENTON[^]

COSTUME DESIGNER
LINDA ROSS

LIGHTING DESIGNER
BRIAN J. LILIENTHAL[^]

SOUND DESIGNER
DAVID REMEDIOS[^]

PRODUCER
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ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
BRIDGET KATHLEEN O'LEARY

DIRECTED BY
SEAN DANIELS

NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 23, 2018

40th Anniversary Community Voices Project recorded, edited, and mastered by David Remedios.

Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley was originally produced by Northlight Theatre, Chicago, Illinois (BJ JONES, Artistic Director, Timothy Evans, Executive Director)



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United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829, represent the designers.

[^] Members of MRT Patriot Program

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The Cast of MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY



ALEXIS BRONKOVIC (*Elizabeth Darcy*) **MRT:** *Silent Sky* (Henrietta Leavitt). **Off-Broadway/New York:** *The Big Broadcast*, The Barrow Group Theatre; *Tiny Geniuses*, Fringe NYC at the Here Arts Center. **Regional:** *Born Yesterday* (Billie Dawn), Guthrie; Chapter Two (Jennie Malone), Cape May Stage; *Ama-*

deus (Constanze), Maltz Jupiter Theatre; *A Christmas Carol* (Belle), Actors Theatre of Louisville; *Postwave Spectacular*, *Heist*, Humana Festival ATL. **Web-series:** *2Some*, *Rainbow Ruthie*. **Television:** *Blacklist*, *Younger*, *The Affair*, *Royal Pains*, *Blue Bloods*. **Film:** *Oleander*, *Jimmy & Don*, *Veritaphobia*, *On Settling Down*, *Julia*. **Education:** BA Theatre Performance from Marymount Manhattan College, Actor's Theatre of Louisville Apprentice Company Alum. **Other:** Thrilled to be back at MRT. So much love and thanks to her Rats and Fire Dragon.



VICHET CHUM (*Arthur de Bourgh*) Vichet is a Cambodian-American actor, writer, director & theater maker, originally from Dallas, Texas, and now living in New York City. His show *KNYUM* had its world premiere at Merrimack in the 2017-2018 season, and he's thrilled to return to this beloved theater. Regionally, he's

worked at Trinity Repertory Company, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Guthrie Theater, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, Huntington Theatre Company, Everyman Theatre, New Harmony Theatre and Weston Playhouse. In NYC, he's worked at the Cherry Lane Theater, Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, the Clurman Theatre at Theatre Row, Project Y Theatre, Woodshed Collective, Slant Theatre Project, and the Incubator Arts Project. His plays have been workshopped at Second Genera-

tion Productions, Crowded Outlet, Weston Playhouse, Cleveland Public Theatre, All For One Theater, Amios, Florida State University, and the New Harmony Project. He is the 2018 Princess Grace Awards recipient in Playwriting. He is a proud graduate of the University of Evansville (BFA) and Brown University/Trinity Repertory Company (MFA). vichetchum.com



AMANDA COLLINS (*Mary Bennet*) **MRT:** Debut. **Regional:** *Old Money* (Commonwealth Shakespeare Company); *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Totalitarians*, *Out of Sterno* (IRNE Nomination, Best Actress), *This Is Our Youth*, *9 Circles* (Gloucester Stage); *Back the Night*, *Elemeno Pea* (Boston Playwrights'); *Women*

Who Mapped The Stars, *Saving Kitty* (with Jennifer Coolidge), *The Life of Galileo* (Central Square Theater); *A Behanding in Spokane*, *The Bald Soprano*, *Speech and Debate*, *Shortstack*, *Colorado*, *What Then* (Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater); *The Seagull* (Harbor Stage/Modern Theatre); *Fun Home*, *Men on Boats*, *My Name Is Asher Lev* (Cape Rep); *Taste of Sunrise* (Wheelock Family Theater); *When The World Was Green*, *An Ideal Husband* (American Stage, Florida); *Jester's Dead* (The Outfit in NYC). She was a founding member of Harbor Stage Company. **Television:** *Olive Kitteridge* (HBO), *Castle Rock* (Hulu), and *Boston's Finest* (ABC Pilot). **Film:** *Sea of Trees*.



VERONIKA DUERR (*Anne de Bourgh*) **MRT:** *Going to See the Kid* (Ellis Elliott), *45 Plays for 45 Presidents*, *Home of the Brave* (Marianne), *It's A Wonderful Life* (Lana Sherwood). **Regional:** *Tall Girls* (World Premiere), *Spoon Lake Blues*

The Cast of MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY

(World Premiere), Alliance Theatre; *Bob: A Life in Five Acts*, Geva Theatre; *Romeo and Juliet* (Juliet), *As You Like It* (Rosalind), *Twelfth Night* (Viola), Atlanta Shakespeare Company. **Education:** BFA, Savannah College of Art and Design. **Other:** 2015 Alliance Theatre Artistic Fellow; Co-founder of The Weird Sisters Theatre Project, a collective of female artists in Atlanta.



VICTORIA GRACE (*Jane Bingley*)

MRT: *Silent Sky* (Margaret). **Regional:** *The Imaginary Invalid* (Beline/Cleante), Soap & Rope Theatre; *Henry IV Parts 1&2* (Lady Mortimer), Shakespeare & Company; *Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike* (Nina), Asolo Rep. **Film/Television:**

Cornerstone Mitsubishi (Spokesperson), Youth Min (Rachel), First Name Films, IFF Boston Audience Award and Lone Star Film Festival Audience Award. **Education:** MFA in acting from FSU, Asolo Conservatory for acting training.



KATIE GRINDELAND (*Lydia Wickham*)

Katie is so excited to make her MRT debut. Her previous stage credits include *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Good* (New Repertory Theatre), *Stuart Little* (Wheelock Family Theatre), *Jesus Moonwalks the Mississippi*, and *An Issue of Blood* (Central Square Theatre), *La Llorona* (Fresh Ink Theatre), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Hampshire Shakespeare Company), and *Nosferatu*, *The Vampyr* (Milky Way Coffee Roasters). She also freelances as an educator, playwright, props artist, and scenic assistant in the Boston area with companies such as New Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Bridge Repertory Theatre, Fresh Ink Theatre, and more. Co-founder of Milky Way Coffee Roasters. Emerson College Class of 2016. Thanks to Bridget for the opportunity, and to Michael H., Sloth, her mom, and sister for their support, love, and wine.



JESSE HINSON (*Fitzwilliam Darcy*)

Jesse is excited to be making his Merrimack Repertory Theatre debut. Speakeasy Stage Company: *Shakespeare in Love*. Actors' Shakespeare Project: *Exit the King*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *King Henry VI, Part 2*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *As You Like It*, *Pericles*, *Twelfth Night*, *Antony and Cleopatra*. New Repertory Theater: *The Whipping Man*, *Holiday Memories*. Greater Boston Stage Company: *Seminar*, *Miracle on 34th Street*. The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theater: *As You Like It*, *Arcadia*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Mortality Play*. Berkshire Theatre Group: *The Puppetmaster of Lodz*, *Moonchildren*, *Macbeth*, *The Einstein Project*, *A Christmas Carol*. Georgia Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*. Jesse earned an MFA in acting at Brandeis University and a BA in theatre at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, GA. He is an assistant teaching professor at Northeastern University.



SHAWN K. JAIN (*Charles Bingley*)

Shawn is thrilled to be making his MRT debut. **Regional:** American Repertory Theater (*Charlotte's Web*, *Assistance*, *Our Town*), New Repertory Theatre (*Heartland*, upcoming), Moscow Art Theater (*Fear and Misery in the Third Reich*), Constellation Theatre (*The Fire and The Rain*),

WAM Theatre (*Honor Killing*), Prince George's County Shakespeare (*Twelfth Night*), Source Festival in Washington, D.C. **Training:** MFA in Acting from A.R.T. Institute at Harvard University/Moscow Art Theater School. **Online:** @shawnjain on Twitter and shawnkjain.com.

Q&A with Playwright and Dramaturg

MARGOT MELCON



How did you meet Lauren Gunderson?

Lauren and I first met when I was working at Marin Theatre Company as their dramaturg—she was brought out in 2009 to work on a play of hers called *Rock Hill*. She ended up moving to the Bay Area, and she and I began collaborating as playwright-dramaturg. We

worked on several pieces in development at Marin Theatre, as well as on the world premiere of her play *I and You*.

How did the two of you come up with the idea of writing a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*?

In the summer of 2014, she was working at Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor on a one-woman show with banjo that was loosely based on *King Lear*. [That play became *The Heath*, which premieres here at MRT in February.] We decided to take a road trip up to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to see a production of *Lear* and on the six-hour car ride, we came up with the idea for *Miss Bennet...* The impulse came from both a practical place—all theater companies need good holiday shows to produce, and there just aren't that many to choose from—and a place of desire to see a different kind of holiday story. Ours is rooted in the complications of being part of a family, one that is made up of very different and dynamic women, and what it means to support each other.

You are a highly regarded dramaturg. Had you written a play before?

Though I had read literally thousands of plays as a dramaturg and the director of new play development at Marin Theatre, I had never written a play. So, my only experience of writing has been as a co-writer, but it has been an incredibly gentle entry into the world of being a playwright. The process of writing can be very solitary, very much alone, even in the theater, which is ultimately a collaborative artform. The nice thing about being part of a writing team is that the collaboration starts early, from the inception of the idea, so you're never staring down at a blank page by

yourself. From the beginning, neither Lauren or myself were precious with the words we wrote, or took too much ownership. It was all in service of the story.

What do you think is the enduring appeal of Jane Austen?

Jane Austen will never go out of style because of her incredible use of wit and comedy. It is never not fun to dive into a world of people with problems that are maybe a little superficial, but always serve to showcase great and complex characters, especially the women. What I love especially about *Pride and Prejudice* is that each of the sisters has such a unique personality—at different times in your life, when you read the novel, you'll identify with a different one of the sisters. If you used to be more of a Lydia, you may evolve into a Lizzy. Or maybe you've always felt like a Mary at heart, until one day you wake up, and you're relating to Jane. That's the lovely thing about complicated characters: they resonate differently because each one of us has a little bit of each of them in us.



Amanda Collins and Vichet Chum. Photo by Meghan Moore.



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Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley

PLOT SYNOPSIS



Katie Grindeland (Lydia Wickham), Veronika Duerr (Anne de Bourgh), Vichet Chum (Arthur de Bourgh), Amanda Collins (Mary Bennet), Alexis Bronkovic (Elizabeth Darcy), Jesse Hinson (Fitzwilliam Darcy), Victoria Grace (Jane Bingley), and Shawn K. Jain (Charles Bingley).
Photo by Meghan Moore.

Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley is the holiday sequel to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Set two years after the novel, we join Elizabeth and Fitzwilliam Darcy at their Pemberley estate where they are hosting this year's Christmas celebration. In this story, we focus on the bookish, middle sister, Mary Bennet, and Arthur de Bourgh as they bond over similar interests. The more they get to know each other the more Mary hopes she has finally found a match. But like most Austen novels, the road to love will not be so simple.

CHARACTERS

Mary Bennet: The middle of the five Bennet sisters, Mary is bookish and has a desire to travel outside of the novels she loves. She is not married.

Anne De Bourgh: The only child of Sir Lewis de Bourgh and the Lady Catherine. Cousin of Arthur de Bourgh and Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Arthur De Bourgh: A student at Oxford University, he is studious and socially awkward. Like Mary, he prefers books to people.

Elizabeth Darcy: The second oldest of the Bennet sisters and hostess of the Christmas gathering. She is married to Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Fitzwilliam Darcy: Husband of Elizabeth Darcy. Loving, generous, and smart.

Charles Bingley: Jane's doting husband.

Jane Bingley: The eldest Bennet sister. She is seven months pregnant and is married to Charles Bingley.

Lydia Wickham: Youngest Bennet sister. She is flirtatious and youthful. Lydia is married to Mr. Wickham, who does not appear.

JANE AUSTEN; THE NOVELIST

BY NAIDITH CONCEPCION

"I DECLARE AFTER ALL THERE IS NO ENJOYMENT LIKE READING! HOW MUCH SOONER ONE TIRES OF ANY THING THAN OF A BOOK! WHEN I HAVE A HOUSE OF MY OWN, I SHALL BE MISERABLE IF I HAVE NOT AN EXCELLENT LIBRARY."



Jane Austen (1775–1817) was an English novelist known for her six major novels and as the voice of the Regency era. Austen's novels were critiques of the society she lived in. Jane never married. She never had to marry for financial stability, which was the usual case for women during that time. She became a successful novelist; her works gained acclaim and were widely read. The Prince Regent even had a set in each of his residences. Her plots often explored the dependence of women on marriage in the pursuit of favorable and social standing and economic security. Her most famous novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, is about the clash between two of its main characters Elizabeth Bennet, the daughter of a country gentleman, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, a rich and aristocratic landowner. Through ups and downs, Elizabeth learns not to make hasty judgments and to appreciate the differences between the superficial and the essential. And in the end, Elizabeth and Darcy come together in love and self-understanding. What differentiated Austen's work from others was her ability to capture the realism of life during that period. Before her, the genre of most novels was Gothic Romance. Her work continues to inspire writers, and she lives on as the voice of an era.

From Wikipedia and *The Guardian*

Portrait of Jane Austen, courtesy of the Jane Austen Society of North America.

THE REGENCY ERA

BY NAIDITH CONCEPCION

THE NOVEL *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND THE PLAY *MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY* ARE SET IN IS THE REGENCY ERA. THIS ERA ENCOMPASSED A TIME OF GREAT SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC CHANGE. IT IS ALSO KNOWN FOR ITS ELEGANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE FINE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE.



Portrait of the Prince Regent's coronation by Sir Thomas Lawrence in 1821, courtesy of the British Museum.

The Regency era lasted from 1795 - 1820 and was named after King George III's son, Prince Regent. Though George III was still on the throne during 1795, the time is still considered part of the era because Prince Regent ruled as his father's proxy. George III was declared unfit to rule, and in 1811, Prince Regent would take the throne. After the passing of George III in 1820, Prince Regent went on to rule as George IV.

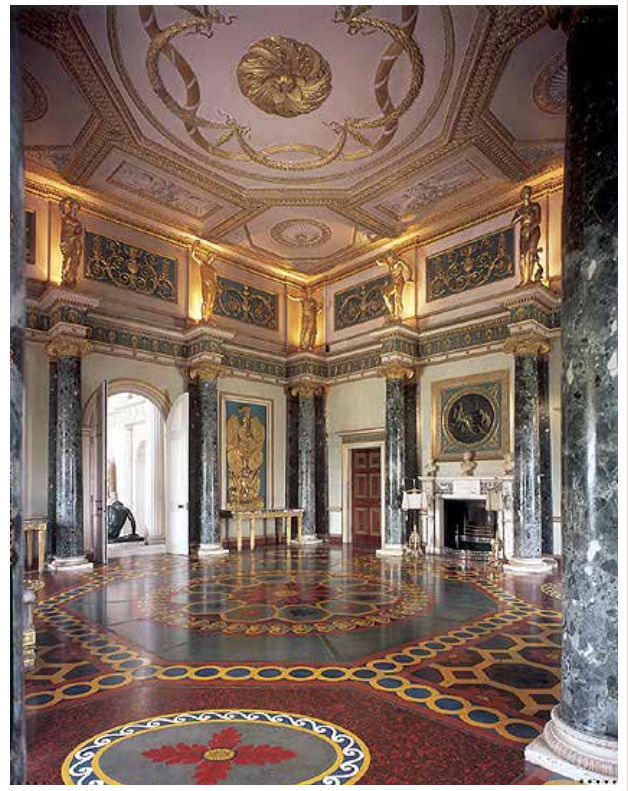
During the 19th century, there was hostility between France and England, yet Prince Regent was discouraged from making decisions regarding official governing business. He instead spent his time indulging in excess and spent more than the treasury could cover. While he was quick to dip into the treasury for personal use, he was also a patron of the arts and literature and created Regent Park. He was extravagant in fashion, indulgent with food, and quite obese. His reputation of excess and self-indulgence likely lead to Jane Austen's dislike of him.

Aside from the elegance and fashion of the era, the Regency era is also known for its strict social classes. Society was divided into various social classes that were based on profession and wealth. The gap in the hierarchy of society was so great that those who were at the bottom viewed those in the upper classes as wondrous and fantastical, something entirely out of reach yet tangibly there.

Compiled from stories at Virtual Commons.



Wentworth Woodhouse — one of the houses that inspired the fictional Pemberley estate, in Rotherham, UK.



Interior views of Wentworth Woodhouse.



O CHRISTMAS TREE

BY NAIDITH CONCEPCION

AN ENGRAVING OF THE ROYAL FAMILY CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AT WINDSOR CASTLE WAS PUBLISHED IN 1848 AND SOON AFTER THEIR GERMAN TRADITIONS WERE ADOPTED WORLDWIDE.



Engraving of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and the children with their Christmas tree.

The Christmas tree has become the symbol of Christmas. an occasion of bonding for many families. People marvel at perfectly decorated trees. The lighting of the Rockefeller Center tree in New York is an event that is broadcasted.

In *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, the Christmas tree's presence receives a negative response from the characters of the play. You're probably wondering why a play set during the holidays would find the tradition odd? Well, it wasn't really part of the holiday in the early 1800s. Christmas trees originated in Germany and weren't accepted by Christians during that time. In fact, it took a while for many people to get around the idea of having a tree in their homes.

Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley begins in England in 1815. The tradition wasn't adopted until the Victorian era in 1846 when Queen Victoria and the German prince, Albert, were illustrated standing next to a Christmas tree with their children. Because they were the royal family, the tradition spread.

Americans were slow in adopting it as a Christmas tradition and found it just as odd as the characters in the play. In 1659, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any observance of December 25 a

penal offense; people were fined for hanging decorations. In the 1840s, it was seen as a pagan symbol and still wasn't accepted by most Americans. By the 1890s, Christmas ornaments were arriving from Germany in the United States and the popularity of the Christmas tree began to rise. Now, the Christmas tree has become the center of joy for many family and friends on Christmas mornings.

Compiled from stories at www.rockefellercenter.com and www.whychristmas.com.

COSTUME & SET DESIGN



3D rendering of the Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley set design by James J. Fenton.



Preliminary costume sketches for Mary Bennet, Arthur de Bourgh, Lydia Wickham, and Fitzwilliam Darcy by Linda Ross.

GLOSSARY OF REFERENCES

Boisterous: Noisy, energetic, and cheerful.

Culpability: Responsibility for a fault.

Estate: An extensive area of land in the country.

Governess: A woman employed to teach children in a private household.

Perjure: False swearing under an oath or vow.

Sonata: A composition for an instrumental soloist.

Tenuous: Very weak or slight.

Virtuoso: A person highly skilled in music or another artistic pursuit.



Vichet Chum, Amanda Collins, Alexis Bronkovic, Katie Grindeland, and Victoria Grace. Photo by Meghan Moore.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In the play, the characters react to the presence of a Christmas tree because it was not part of the holiday tradition. Is there a tradition you participate in, or have seen, that is unique in celebrating the holidays?
- The play is a sequel to the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which deals with the themes of the title. Are there similar themes in this play? Are there others?



Shawn K. Jain, Vichet Chum, and Jesse Hinson. Photo by Meghan Moore.

SUGGESTED READING

- *Bridget Jones Diary* by Helen Fielding
- *Longbourn* by Jo Baker
- *Eligible* by Curtis Sittenfeld
- *Sense & Sensibility* by Jane Austen
- *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

SPECIAL THANKS

Lowell Blueprint, Inc.
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Amanda Collins and Vichet Chum. Photo by Meghan Moore.



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