Theatre Royal Plymouth

Pride and prejudice (sort of)

Audio described performance

 Sat Feb 1st @ 2.30p.m.

Touch Tour 1.30p.m.

Welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth and this hilarious  musical  production of Pride and Prejudice(sort of) written by Isobel Mc Arthur after Jane Austen and the 2024/25  UK Tour is sponsored by Cunard whose President is Katie Mc Alister.The majority of the music is delivered via karaoke machines and some  instruments;  piano, recorder, glockenspiel,maracas, guitar and tambourine   are  played by members of the cast.

11 scenes are in Act 1 all interspersed with well known pop songs being  sung and  all tweaked to suit the  many occasions, sad, happy and angry.

My name is Pauline, your audio describer for this Act and my colleague Denise, will commence her programme notes approx 10 minutes before the start of Act 2.

I will be describing the action as it occurs, without, I hope, spoiling your enjoyment.

**There will be expletive deletives , flashes and sounds   of a thunderstorm.  pistol shots  and some mild horseplay.**

The show lasts for 2 hours 20  with a 15 minute interval.

The show opened in Newcastle and will go to Northampton from here before travelling to 20 other venues across the UK. So much for being  originally commissioned to run for two and half weeks- 7 years later!

Isobel Mc Arthur is the writer and director who gained an Olivier and Evening Standard award from the West End and the show opened in The Tron Theatre in the East End of  Glasgow. The story is told through the servants whose upper class  employers depend on them. In the original novel there are 118 characters, in this version 20 characters are played by 5 actors. It is a fast moving  joyful ensemble piece which should satisfy even the most  loyal Austenites.

Anyone who has never experienced the theatre is urged by Isobel to make this show their first trip into this magical world.

The story centres around the Bennet family of five daughters who need to make prosperous marriages as, being women in the 18th century, they cannot inherit wealth and property from their father. Mrs Bennet is a woman who lives on her nerves and is  desperate to engineer good connections for her daughters by any means possible.  Her husband is a silent long suffering partner.Jane and Elizabeth are the eldest and are the  first in Mrs Bennet’s  matchmaking sights.

The  set  comprises of a large hall with a wide  pale  curved  banistered staircase leading  from the left to a  long landing. The risers are papered to represent shelves  of books. Under the stairs are two   pale blue doors which are used as entrances and exits. A full height wall  to the right of   the staircase  is  also covered in book decorated wall paper. A concealed door  in this wall,permits entrances and exits. Under the landing stands a white upright piano. Piles of books stand at the foot of the staircase and others are dotted around and are used as seats and podiums as the need arises.

Each scene takes place here with the addition of various pieces of simple furniture brought on by the actors.

 A preshow features four female servants, Anne, Clara , Flo and Tillie  in simple  regency style white ankle dresses, also wearing black Doc Martin boots  and they  are busy cleaning and answering bells and one sings, **Everyday I write a book** before they in turn address the audience prior to  the story beginning. They   steer the course of the action in ways largely  unnoticed by the main characters. A fifth servant burst from under the stairs, waving  a dirty plunger.

 We arrive in Longbourn and a regency three panelled  Dressing screen is placed and a  white upholstered piano stool  which opens to double as  a mirrored dressing table.  Clara explains, this  is  ‘A sleepy wee place, about halfway between London and Cambridge, called Meryton.’

The servants outline the happenings and we meet Mrs Bennet, wearing a red open fronted dress with a frilled neckline and sleeves. We meet Jane  in a high waisted  blue dress,Lizzie in a  similar green dress and  bespectacled Mary  in a fussy pink dress wearing a bow  in her hair.  Mrs Bennett  is overseeing her five daughters preparing to attend a monthly  Ball in the Town

 We are  in Meryton Town Hall for the monthly Ball and there is  a stall at the rear with a banner on its front saying Meryton Ball. The table is set with paper cups and various refreshments. Coloured bulbs hang from a frame above. We meet  Elizabeth’s best friend, Charlotte Lucas, in a plain brown dress. Here Jane meets cheerful Mr. Bingley in a  high collared frock coat trimmed with blue,  for the first time and a mutual attraction is marked by the **Will you still love  me tomorrow?**  Elizabeth meets the arrogant negative Darcy who is dressed in a dark  tail coat over a gold  waistcoat and Elizabeth  feels  singing  **You’re so vain,** is appropriate.

The  three panelled screen now  represents the toilets in the Town Hall, with silhouettes of a regency man on the right panel and a regency lady on the left with WC on the central panel. Two servants  on either side of the screen hold roller towels on their folded arms. Elizabeth and Charlotte are  discussing the Ball  as are  Darcy and Bingley . Charlotte, on leaving Elizabeth, sings ‘**Everybody knows that  I love you’  possibly  re**ferring to Elizabeth.

 Back in Longbourn and ,as, before, the reversed  dressing screen and footstool  is where a discussion of the proposed visit by Jane to Netherfield Park is being arranged. Mrs Bennet is her usual scheming self and makes Jane ride to the Park despite imminent rain.She sings **‘At last my love has come along’** astride a life size horse and accompanied by a servant knocking two coconut shells together and another  runs across with a mop on a stick, making bird noises before thunder and lightning makes everyone run for cover.

 In the Living Room and Mr Bennet is represented by a high backed chair with its back to us and a newspaper is visible.   Elizabeth, Mary and Mrs Bennet are sitting around the room. Mrs Bennet is on the sofa, Mary at the foot of the stairs and Jane unsettled. The atmosphere is tense.

 In Netherfield Park   and the surroundings are opulent, a luxurious purple  chaise  is central  and an expensive looking large vase on a plinth  on the right denote  a rich  house.  An elegant  lamp standard stands at the foot of the stairs. Elizabeth has arrived to see Jane  and has walked through muddy fields and arrives with a muddy dress and boots, much to the disgust of Miss Caroline Bingley. Darcy makes an appearance and is almost civil to Elizabeth.

Darcy is playing cards, perched on the head of the chaise   and  Elizabeth is  reluctantly persuaded to sit next to him but   Miss Bingley muscles in between them. The conversation is stilted and almost polite with jealous remarks made by Miss Bingley. A pianist plays **‘Something Changed’** as background music. There are silent meaningful looks  to Elizabeth from Darcy (not unnoticed by Caroline) as they sit on either side of the room with Caroline on the chaise in the centre.

Jane  and Elizabeth  arrive back at Longbourne  and a holdall is in evidence and Elizabeth and Mrs Bennet discuss their stay at Netherfield when Mr Collins , a  self important clergyman  and their cousin, arrives to choose a  bride from the eldest daughters.  The obsequious  Mr Collins is in an oversized  beige knitted waistcoat over a brown dress with the obligatory dog collar and glasses.

 Weeks have passed and Mr Collins is reluctantly hosted by Elizabeth and Jane  in Longbourne until it becomes evident that Mr Collins has  marital designs on Elizabeth as Jane is supposedly promised to Mr Bingley as suggested by her mother.

Mrs Bennet, Jane, Elizabeth and Lydia exclaim at the wealth on display in the house when they arrive at Netherfield for the Ball. They are all in the same dresses with the addition of a fancy fascinator. **‘ Love and Marriage’** is playing in the background. Miss Bingley sails in wearing a deep turquoise busselled dress with a feather headdress whilst Charlotte makes a surprising disclosure to Elizabeth. George Whickham arrives in his dress uniform and talks to Elizabeth. He  takes her outside by the large  rubbish skip  adorned with the words Jane Aust- bin.   He   tells her his version of knowing Darcy and his sister Georgiana.

 Returning to the party  and it   has   rapidly declined into a drunken debacle with the Bennet family leading the way by Mrs Bennet  drunkenly in  charge of the mic standing on the chaise, Mary trying to sing but being shushed by her family and Lydia waving a pistol around and giggling insanely. Jane is upset that Bingley is leaving for London and tries to run but is stopped somewhat roughly by Miss Bingley. All is hectic and that is where we leave them  for 15 minutes.

Cast

Emma Rose Creaner…….. Tillie/Charlotte Lucas/Charles Bingley/ Miss Bingley

Eleanor Kane………………….Anne/ Mary Bennet/Lydia Bennet/ Mr Gardiner

Rhianna Mc Greevy………..Flo/Mrs Bennet/  Fitzwilliam Darcy

Naomi Preston Low………..Effie/ Elizabeth Bennet

Christine Steel……………….Clara/Jane Bennet/ Lady Catherine De Burgh

A chair……………………………Mr Bennet

Pride and Prejudice (sort of) Programme Notes – Act Two Audio Description Performance Saturday 1st February @ 2:30 pm 2025 Audio Describer Denise Reeves

Good Afternoon Everyone and welcome back to this unique adaptation of Jane Austen’s most iconic love story Pride and Prejudice.

As the audience return to their seats the open set is that of Act One with scene changes continuing to be made by the actors themselves as they move furniture and introduce new props to compliment the storyline.

Colourful modern day language, mild insults, expletives and comedy is linked to the story and more hilariously well-chosen karaoke songs performed at pivotal moments.

As the bell sounds, Act Two begins at Longbourn. Christmas decorations and Christmas stockings hang limply entwined down the banisters. A Christmas tree bedecked in baubles stands beneath the staircase. In the centre is the upright piano its’ back facing the audience with a microphone on top. To the right is a sofa, side table and lamp. Tillie appears carrying a plunger and spots the piano. After much hesitation and in a world of her own, she sits at the piano and breaks into song, joined by the other four sisters positioned on the stairs with mics, acting as her backing singers.

Mrs Bennet then appears joined by Jane and Elizabeth each forlornly wearing paper hats from crackers. The piano is moved to the back under the curve of the staircase. Mrs Bennett suitably spirited is delighted with the prospect of one of her daughters being married.

Next, Jane is in her aunt’s modest London home. The spotlight falls on her at the top of the staircase looking rather lonely and vulnerable with a microphone, the rest of the set is dark. Jane recounts her letter to Elizabeth from London as the lights go up on Elizabeth in Mr Collins’ somewhat beige home. Collins and Charlotte exhibit their house whilst Elizabeth tries to avoid them.

We move then to the impressive Rosings the home of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. This ridiculously pompous woman makes her entrance rather precariously down the palatial staircase to a fanfare of lights and music. Walking with a cane, wearing a totally impractical huge red and pink bustle dress with a large red picture hat adorned with feathers, red and pink roses and a red bow tied under her chin, she settles on a red throne like chair at the foot of the staircase. Whilst Collins bows and charlotte curtseys, Elizabeth is quite taken aback before taking the hint to curtsey too. She is then subject to questioning by Lady Catherine whilst they await the arrival of her nephew Mr Darcy.

The space then transforms to The Parsonage as the clock sounds for top of the hour. Miss Elizabeth sits on a chair in front of the clock on the wall with a crucifix alongside, as Mr Collins requests his morning recitation. Elizabeth not willing to do so would rather go for a long walk – and so the scene transforms to the imaginary outdoors as she stands on a stool of books and makes her way over the terrain riddled with brambles

Back at the Parsonage, Charlotte sits with her embroidery in front of the clock as Elizabeth tells Charlotte of her encounter with Mr Darcy on her walk. The following conversation causing a little tension in the room before Charlotte is summoned by Mr Collins.

The next morning at the Parsonage, Anne leaves a letter. With no sign of whom it’s from and no-one else around, Elizabeth opens it. As she reads it Darcy appears at the top of the stairs, as the voice of the letter. It explains everything regarding his family’s association with George Wickham.

Moving then to Longbourn, Lydia’s music is loud, as she stomps around holding an undesirable dress of Mary’s and obviously upset. Jane and Elizabeth sit on the sofa nonchalantly chatting whilst eating cornflakes out of a large box.

Elizabeth declares to Jane she is need of a holiday and the scene quickly changes to Elizabeth and Aunty Gardiner standing in front of Pemberley House – the home of Mr Darcy in Derbyshire, which is rather a tourist attraction. Three servants are cleaning up inside and Elizabeth is uncharacteristically unsettled, particularly when unannounced Darcy appears and invites them to stay over and join his friends for drinks. They accept. Elizabeth stands and watches Darcy while Anne and Clara carry drinks and cakes around on silver salvers as Darcy entertains his guests.

Still in Pemberley, Elizabeth sits crying holding a letter she received from Lydia, throwing everyone into flummox. Three of the servants stand behind her as Darcy appears wondering what’s wrong. Elizabeth decides she has to get home.

Back at Longbourn, Mr Bennet is in his chair as ever, back to the audience. Mrs Bennet is consumed with worry following the news of Lydia and reclines on the sofa, fanned by Jane. Elizabeth paces the floor behind them, until Lydia suddenly appears with more news.

Disorientation follows as Lady Catherine de Bourgh suddenly appears in the Bennet’s living room asking Elizabeth if she has designs on her nephew Mr Darcy.

The living room unchanged, we then see Mrs Bennet asleep on the sofa. Jane appears with sherry and glasses for Elizabeth and her mother, who coincidentally wakes up at the sound of clinging glasses. Jane and Elizabeth rather lethargically, join their mother on the sofa as their raise their glasses in unison to what has transformed.

The story comes to a close as it began with that of the servants, Clara, Tillie, Flo and Effie wandering around with their Marigolds, mop and bucket, cloths in hand, clearing up the mess left, covered in confetti, props and bits of furniture. As they tidy they turn to the audience each recounting the end of the story. That is until they notice that one of the servants is missing.