



'Pride & Prejudice' review

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by Scott Wiser

Theater review: In the world of virtual theater, not everything is written for the computer screen

Virtual theater has evolved through 2020 and 2021 into a thriving art form.

Mixing the spontaneity of live theater with the visual effects of web conferencing platforms can provide an opportunity to showcase stories that otherwise would be difficult to stage.

Finding a play enhanced through virtual theater can be as challenging as finding an appropriate suitor in 1800s England.

UAF Theatre's "Pride and Prejudice," written by Kate Hamill and directed by Rebecca George, is not a perfect match for the Zoom platform and makes the audience wish we could have seen the 2020 version live on a Fairbanks stage.

Based on the novel by little known author Jane Austen, "Pride and Prejudice" is the story of the five, no sorry, four Bennet sisters (They omitted Kitty, you bas****s!!). Matriarch Mrs. Bennet (Paloma Polanco) makes it her life's ambition to find suitors for her daughters.

The story focuses on the potential romances for the two eldest daughters, Jane Bennet (Riley von Borstel) and Elizabeth "Lizzy" Bennet (Isabella Nygren).

Lizzy is a rambunctious conversationalist who rails against marriage and promises to all who want to hear that it will not be her future.

While dancing at balls, she meets several potential suitors, including the taciturn and often rude Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy (Luke Williams).

Despite these limitations, to produce a play as elaborate as a virtual "Pride and Prejudice" during the pandemic is an absolute achievement.

In the novel, we follow Lizzy and Mr. Darcy's courtship through contentious debates and witty repartee. Nygren and Williams do a marvelous job of showing the growing romance written between the lines.

Hamill's version is not really a farce, a parody, nor exactly a faithful retelling of the 19th century classic. Hamill fails to provide nuanced satire and more often than not, it just isn't funny. Her script also robs us of some of the classic Lizzy/Darcy debates.

If we can't feel the building tension from all their conversations and their mutual misunderstandings about each other, we care less for their characters.

On a stage, George could balance these shortcomings with an elaborate set and effective staging.

Costume designer Amanda Casterline's stunning and innovative pieces would stand out beautifully during an ornate ball.

George utilizes a few Zoom visual tricks along the way and has some clever ideas on how to safely pandemic

dance. But it is difficult to capture the intensity of these social engagements on the small screen using Hamill's rendition.

It is a mediocly written play forced into a mismatched medium, and it just doesn't work.

Despite these limitations, to produce a play as elaborate as a virtual "Pride and Prejudice" during the pandemic is an absolute achievement.

This reviewer has a difficult enough time leaving the couch, let alone finding the capacity to actually create something of value.

It is not feigning praise to esteem greatly the cast and crew's accomplishments.

To do something this massive when some of us can only hideaway and wait for the world to be OK, is a true feat.

While we do miss live theater, this production reminds us how talented is the theatre community of Fairbanks.

That will get us through another season of virtual theater, until it is safe to watch in person.



From left, Siri Tuttle, Isabella Nygren and Riley von Borstel appear in Theatre UAF's production of "Pride and Prejudice," streaming now.

KADE MENDELWITZ/THEATRE UAF