



*Jane Austen's*

# EMMA

MUSICAL

PRODUCTION NUMBER 232

Apr. 23 — THROUGH — Jun. 05

2021  
SEASON

Annual  
Sponsors:



HALIFAX  
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“... a heroine whom no one but myself will much like.”  
— Jane Austen

While you can make up your own mind about Emma’s likability during tonight’s show, it is undeniable that Utah holds a deep affinity for Jane Austen herself. Through movies and books to plays and musicals, “Janeites” throughout our area have a special relationship with Austen’s novels of Regency England.

Austen was born in a small village in Hampton, England in 1775. After many early writing attempts, she saw success with four novels published in her lifetime (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*) followed by another two posthumously (*Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*). As novel writing was not an acceptable thing for a woman to do, all these novels were published anonymously. Over 200 years after her death, that anonymity is gone. She is still celebrated worldwide, and especially so here.

Even within the past 12 months, you may have seen our revival of *Sense & Sensibility*, the 2020 feature film of *Emma* (starring Anya Taylor-Joy of *The King’s Gambit*), or the PBS adaptation of her unfinished novel *Sanditon*. Within the past few years, you also may have seen Jane Austen onstage at theatres throughout the state such as Weber State University Theatre, Pioneer Theatre Company, Lyric Repertory, the Utah Shakespeare Festival, and more.

We’ve even seen an adaptation that brings Austen directly to Provo in the

2003 film *Pride & Prejudice: A Latter-Day Comedy*. Sarah Culver, writing in *Meridian* magazine, pointed out that “Austen’s themes about Regency society, like the expectation for women to marry young and the high emphasis on traditional values like chastity before marriage, fit into the context of LDS culture.” *Variety* magazine agreed in their review: “the substitution of a present-day Mormon setting for Austen’s Regency England is an inspired one, given the correlation between the two cultures’ emphasis on traditional values and, most importantly, marriage.”

Austen’s local appeal is backed by numbers: when Texan publisher and editor Howard Clarke released a new edition of *Jane Austen, Her Life and Letters A Family Record*, he found an odd fact staring back at him: the Amazon



Depiction of Austen from *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1871) written by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh, and based on the sketch by Cassandra



Publicity photo for Jane Austen's *Emma* (2021)

sales in Salt Lake City outstripped all other US cities by a wide margin. Salt Lake City was buying 8x as many copies as any other!

Clarke contacted Aspen Anderson, the Utah Regional Coordinator of the Jane Austen Society of North America for any insight. In an *LDS Living* article, Anderson explains how she sees the connection: “Jane Austen’s society and the way that it was reflected in her writings reveal a time of manners and morals that are not present today in most of our society [...] We still believe in abstinence before marriage and fidelity after marriage, which makes a lot of the plot lines more relatable to us. We have similar values in the ways that we conduct ourselves before marriage which is a lot more similar to the way that they would behave back then.”

In a *Deseret News* article entitled “Utah Loves Jane Austen” Jennifer Adams, the Salt Lake based author of *Remarkably Jane: Notable Quotations on Jane Austen*, has this to say: “Her work is about many things — from the economics of sex to English country manners. But in the end, Jane Austen is ultimately about family and marriage: two topics that occupy the minds and dominate the culture of many Utah women.”

Beyond our ties to Austen through local culture, recent writers have suggested that COVID-19 has perhaps given us an even deeper understanding of the world Jane lived in and wrote about. Jessica Goldstein, writing in *Marie Claire*, came to the realization

during a trip to the grocery store at the beginning of the pandemic: “In a Jane Austen novel,” she writes, “there’s always a young woman on the cusp of adulthood, right at that giddy, exhilarating stretch when your life really starts to happen. But instead of getting to travel the world, galavant about with friends, go to a university, maybe get a job so her entire financial future doesn’t hinge on her fiancé’s estate situation, our heroine just...hangs out at home. With her parents. And her siblings. And then: She waits. Her life is constrained by an endless list of things she is not allowed to do, like go literally anywhere without it being a whole production, or enjoy so much as a friendly hug with a potential love interest.”

Like so many of us during the past year, Austen’s heroines are often stuck at home, entertaining themselves with cards and the harpsichord. A walk outside is a refreshing change, and a trip for groceries one of the few times you could see those outside your family. A visitor always requires preparation and a clear six-foot distance, while a simple ungloved touch is cause for scandal.

Perhaps Utah playwright Melissa Leilani Larson (who has adapted two of Austen’s novels for the stage) sums it up best in a KSL interview: “I think there are a lot of smart, thoughtful women in Utah Valley who appreciate good characters in good stories that are well told. Handsome menfolk and a little Britishness sure don’t hurt.”

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg Mark Fossen, MFA