

## Sense and Sensibility

By Roger Parsley & Andy Graham

Based on the novel by Jane Austen

REMINDER:

POST-SHOW  
DISCUSSION  
WEDNESDAYS

8/31, 9/7, 9/14

with cast and artistic staff

## About Jane Austen

Jane Austen lived a quiet life in southern England. In a time when single women were pitied, she forged her own way using her talent for observation and her ability to put those observations on paper despite the social stigma her society attached to women authors.

She was born in 1775, in Hampshire, England, the seventh of eight children. Her family valued literature and reading and, although her formal education ended at twelve, she had access to everything in the family's extensive library. She played the pianoforte and her family performed plays and read aloud, both from their library and from the original writings of family members.

Interestingly, at this time not only were upper and middle class women not supposed to work, but they were trained with one thing in mind. They were taught arts including painting and music, and just enough of subjects like Shakespeare to make them interesting, and therefore marriageable. This was not by any means a complete education as we know it now. In fact, it was believed that if a woman had too much education, it would be impossible for her to marry.

At this time, novels were a relatively new form. Many early novels were written in the form of a series of letters (epistolary) and were long and sprawling. Gothic novels, with their exotic foreigners and ruined castles were popular, as were sentimental or romantic novels full of exaggerated emotions and improbable plots. Many novels were considered immoral for women, despite the fact that women wrote many

of them, including Ann Radcliffe (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794, parodied by Austen in *Northanger Abbey*), and Maria Edgeworth (*Castle Rackrent*, 1800). Despite the success of these female writers and others, this male dominated society believed women incapable of writing work with literary merit.

None of this deterred Austen. She started her first novel, *Lady Susan*, in 1793. Sometime before 1796 she read a draft of another novel, *Elinor and Marianne*, to her family, which she later retitled *Sense and Sensibility* and published in 1811. After her budding romance with Irishman Tom Lefroy was squelched by his family's interference in 1796, she started two novels, *First Impressions*, which was eventually published as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Susan*, which was eventually published as *Northanger Abbey*.

Between 1800 and 1810 she wrote a novel, *The Watsons*, which remained unfinished. It is unclear exactly why or when Austen stopped writing, but those years were fraught with family issues including a move to Bath, the death of her father, and a proposal of marriage which she accepted and then retracted the next morning.



Continued on page 2



## Music in *Sense and Sensibility*

*Sense and Sensibility* is not technically a musical, but many of the scenes end with the simple instruction, “Music,” the characters can often be found dancing—if not well, then at least enthusiastically—and Marianne plays the pianoforte (as did Jane Austen herself).

So it comes as no surprise that *Sense and Sensibility*'s director Robert Kelley decided to make music a big part of the show. And what better music to use, than music directly from Jane Austen's personal songbooks?

Austen played music not just for social gatherings, or to pass her time as an unmarried woman, but also to express herself. She utilizes music in her novels, and each of her heroines displays a clear musical or non-musical sense. But Austen is careful to keep the characters and the music balanced—neither character nor music should overwhelm the other. She uses music as an expansion of expression for her characters—just as she used it for herself in her own life.

Purchasing sheet music was expensive and difficult in those days, so Jane would borrow music from family, friends, and circulating libraries, and hand copy it for herself. She often made notes and suggestions for playing, and in one case, changed a lyric from “soldier” to “sailor”—a profession that figured strongly in her life and in her novels. Among the music she loved and collected, prominent themes include naval affairs, country life, drinking songs, love, female character pieces, and the French Revolution.

As you watch *Sense and Sensibility*, listen to the music and lyrics you hear—you'll discover not only how they apply to the play, but also what Jane found intriguing and important some 200 years ago. ★ Syche Phillips

### About Jane Austen *Continued from page 1*

In 1810 Austen was writing again, working on *Sense and Sensibility*, which was published in 1811 at her own expense. Because of the stigma attached to female authors she published it anonymously (as “A Lady”), as she did all her novels, and it became very popular. In fact, the stigma of being a woman writer kept Austen from publishing under her own name her entire life; each successive novel's author was listed as the author of a previous work, so *Pride and Prejudice* was “by the Author of *Sense and Sensibility*.”

The periodical *The British Critic* reviewed *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), her most famous novel, as “very far superior to almost all the publications of the kind which have come before us.” Its success generated three printings in her lifetime.

*Pride and Prejudice* was followed by *Mansfield Park* (1814)

and *Emma* (1815). Of *Emma*, contemporary novelist Susan Ferrier said it had, “no story whatsoever, and the heroine is no better than other people; but the characters are all so true to life, and the style so piquant, that it does not require the adventitious aids of mystery and adventure.”

Austen completed her final novel, *Persuasion*, in 1816. Unfortunately, by this time her health was declining. She continued working, starting *Sandition*, which remained unfinished at her death on July 18, 1817. Her final novels, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published posthumously, the first of her works published under her own name. Her reputation has continued to grow and she is now one of the most admired authors of the 19th century. ★ Vickie Rozell

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## Austen and Pop Culture

William Shakespeare's plays have enjoyed over four centuries of popularity and his works are exalted for the universality of their themes. Few authors measure up to the Bard, either in popularity or in adaptability. Jane Austen, however, is getting close. *Sense and Sensibility* hits the TheatreWorks stage this August, Hollywood revels in film adaptations of her novels, and contemporary writers inspired by Austen have made "chick lit" a cultural phenomenon. No matter where you look, everything is coming up Austen.

Over the last few decades, moviegoers have been treated to a wealth of Jane Austen novels-turned-films. Colin Firth's appearance in the 1995 A&E mini-series *Pride and Prejudice* turned a whole generation into Jane Austen devotees. Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet both appeared in *Sense and Sensibility*, which was also released in 1995. In 1996, two separate versions of *Emma* were produced, one a major Hollywood title starring Gwyneth Paltrow and the other a smaller, British production. In 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* was remade, this time drawing on the star power of Keira Knightly.

In addition to period movies, a number of Austen related original films have been produced over the last few years. *Becoming Jane*, a fictionalized biography in which Ann Hathaway portrays Jane Austen herself, graced the silver screen in 2007. That same year, *The Jane Austen Book Club* was adapted from a novel to a film. In 2008, the BBC produced a four-part miniseries called *Lost in Austen*, about a modern day Jane Austen devotee who is transported back in time to the world of *Pride and Prejudice*. A Hollywood adaptation of the series is reportedly in production.

The movie industry isn't the only one heavily influenced by Jane Austen these days. Walk into any mainstream bookstore and you're likely to find a table devoted to modern day versions of Austen inspired tales known as "chick lit."

Chick lit is a relatively new genre of fiction, appearing first in the mid 1990s. Some find the term condescending, reducing a whole field of literature to intellectual cotton candy. However, others describe chick lit as a new brand of post-feminist literature which depicts the full breadth of the female experience.

Although chick lit wasn't identified as a literary trend until the last few decades, Jane Austen's novels share many attributes with the popular new genre. According to a 2004 article in the *Washington Post*, chick lit protagonists are generally "women who seem trapped in the same materialistic, class-restricted, marriage-desirable world as Austen's women were, even though they now have hip jobs and their own apartments and credit cards with absurdly high limits."

Even if you don't associate Jane Austen with the chick lit



trend, her influence on writers Julia Barrett and Joan Aiken is undeniable. Both women have written Jane Austen spin-off novels, telling their own stories in the universe of Jane Austen. Barrett's works include *Presumption*, a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*, and *The Third Sister*, a sequel to *Sense and Sensibility*. Aiken's novel, *Jane Fairfax*, tells the story of Emma Woodhouse's friend and rival.

And finally, Jane Austen's words have been borrowed in a most unexpected way by Seth Grahame-Smith. His 2009 parody novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* interweaves actual text from Austen's novel with newly imagined scenes depicting a zombie invasion. The novel was soon followed by *Sense and Sensibility and Seamonsters*, another clever Jane Austen mashup.

While Austen's novels have been well known for nearly two hundred years, it wasn't until the last two decades that her popularity exploded. Her value as cultural currency has skyrocketed—quoting Austen is now akin to quoting Shakespeare. Many reasons have been put forth to explain the sudden interest in everything Austen. Maybe it took readers a few centuries to catch up with Austen's modern sensibilities. Perhaps her sharp renderings of class distinctions help us better understand our own social stratifications. Or maybe it just took a film appearance by Colin Firth. Regardless, it is impossible to deny the growing impact of Jane Austen's works on modern pop-culture. Even *People* magazine declared us to be living in "a Jane Austen moment," and they seem to be right. ★ Katie Dai

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## Setting the Scene

Jane Austen filled her books with details from her life and those of the people around her. That includes the locations in which she set her stories. In the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, the Dashwood sisters begin the story at their family estate, Norland, in Sussex, move to a cottage in Devon, and spend the winter at a house in London.

Norland is a fictional estate that the Dashwood sisters must leave when their father dies, their half-brother inherits the estate, and his wife makes it clear that they are not welcome. Austen herself did not live in a large house on an estate, but one of her brothers, who was adopted by heirless cousins, did. That home, which Austen visited, is called Godmersham and is located in Kent.

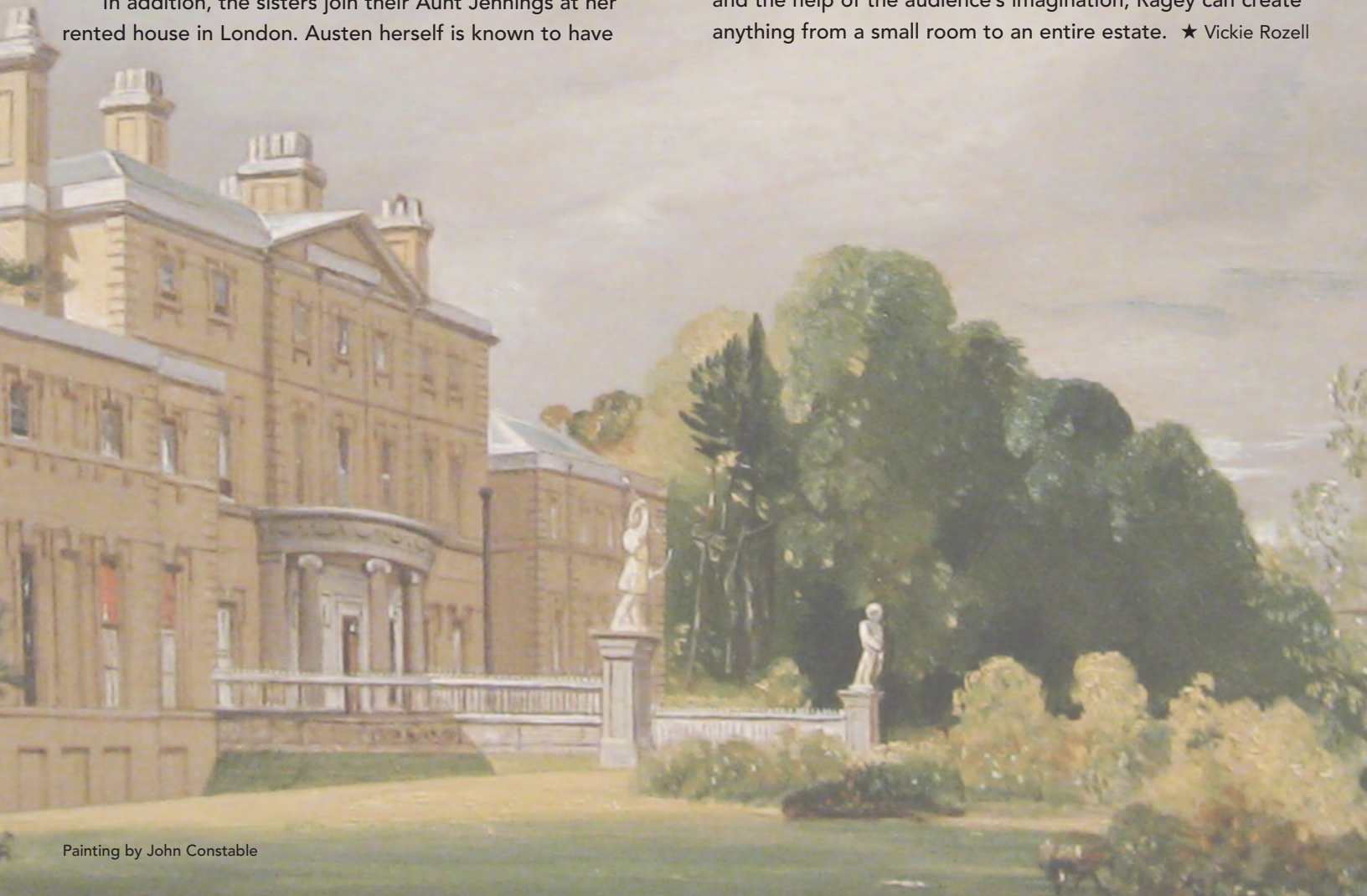
When they relocate to Devon, the sisters talk about moving into a “small” cottage. Contrary to what we might imagine, their cottage is described as including a drawing room downstairs and four bedrooms upstairs. After her father died, Austen lived with her mother and sister in a similar cottage called Chawton, which had even more bedrooms than the Dashwood’s.

In addition, the sisters join their Aunt Jennings at her rented house in London. Austen herself is known to have

made trips to London where she enjoyed the theatre as well as balls and other social pursuits.

All of this raises a question. With so many locations, how does Scenic Designer Joe Ragey take the audience to so many disparate places? He knows he can’t recreate the locations in the detail of a movie—that isn’t what the theatre does best. What the theatre does better than film, however, is to engage the audience’s imagination, offering them a few specific and important scenic elements and asking them to participate in the process by imagining the rest. So, a garden gate and a fountain comprise a garden, a chaise and a pianoforte suggest a drawing room, and a bed and a chair delineate a bedroom.

In order to capture the immense vistas described in the novel and the script, Ragey took inspiration from the landscape paintings of John Constable (1776–1837) to produce a series of painted drops and projections to suggest Austen’s world. The drops are hand painted in the TheatreWorks scene shop by scenic artist Tom Langguth. With these backdrops, combined with carefully chosen scenic elements and the help of the audience’s imagination, Ragey can create anything from a small room to an entire estate. ★ Vickie Rozell



Painting by John Constable

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Thomas Gorrebeek as Edward and Jennifer Le Blanc as Elinor PHOTO TRACY MARTIN

## THE CAST

In speaking order

Elinor Dashwood	<b>Jennifer Le Blanc*</b>
Marianne Dashwood	<b>Katie Fabel*</b>
Edward Ferrars	<b>Thomas Gorrebeek*</b>
Aunt Jennings	<b>Stacy Ross*</b>
Colonel Brandon	<b>Mark Anderson Phillips*</b>
Willoughby	<b>Michael Scott McLean*</b>
Lucy Steele	<b>Lucy Littlewood</b>
Servants	<b>Alexander Lenarsky</b>
	<b>Emily Ota</b>
	<b>Jeremy Ryan</b>

Stage Manager	<b>Rebecca Muench*</b>
Assistant Stage Manager	<b>Joshua M. Rose*</b>

\* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

Actors' headshots and bios can be found on the *Sense and Sensibility* page on TheatreWorks' website. [theatreworks.org/shows/1112-season/senseandsensibility](http://theatreworks.org/shows/1112-season/senseandsensibility)

## Sense and Sensibility Plot Synopsis

Elinor and Marianne Dashwood's father has died, leaving them at the mercy of their brother and his wife. Despite Elinor's growing attachment to her brother-in-law Edward Ferrars, the sisters decide to move from their ancestral home at Norland in southwest England to Barton Cottage on the estate of their Aunt Jennings, 200 miles away. Their move introduces them to new people, including Colonel Brandon, who falls in love with Marianne, and the romantic Willoughby who sweeps her off her feet. As time goes on, romantic difficulties ensue testing the sense and sensibility of both sisters.

Producers

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## Jane Austen Society of North America

TheatreWorks is happy to welcome the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) to *Sense and Sensibility*. JASNA is a 4,000-member nonprofit group, dedicated to the enjoyment and appreciation of Jane Austen and her writing. The group is composed of over 60 regional groups in the United States and Canada, and is open to all.

JASNA will host their semi-annual meeting in the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts rehearsal hall, from 11am–1pm, and then will attend the matinee performance of *Sense and Sensibility* on Saturday, September 17th.

**JASNA invites any and all with an Austen interest and September 17th matinee tickets to attend the pre-show**

**meeting and post-show discussion.** As Jane Austen said in *Emma*, "It is such a happiness when good people get together—and they always do."

The featured speaker for the pre-show meeting is Zoe Klippert, a local Austen scholar, and the lecture will focus on letters written by a niece of Jane Austen, Catherine Hubback, who lived in Oakland for many years. After the matinee there will be a special Q&A talkback about the show with TheatreWorks artistic staff.

For more information about the meeting, please email Syche Phillips at [sphillips@theatreworks.org](mailto:sphillips@theatreworks.org), or visit the Jane Austen Society of North America at [www.jasna.org](http://www.jasna.org).

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