



Recorded Events

5th Ave. Theatre Community Conversation, Behind the Scenes of 'Austen's Pride'

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[00:00:36] Everyone, oh, I got an applause.

[00:00:40] I know we're in a small room, but we are podcasting and livestreaming today, so we'll be using microphones so you get you get to hear us in surround sound.

[00:00:49] I guess it also means if you have a question I might have you hold until I get next to you to to get you on the mike just so that it's a record for posterity. And if you have big problems with that, just let me know.

[00:01:02] And so my name is Orlando Morales and I am the Director of Education and Engagement at the Fifth Avenue Theatre. We're really excited to partner with Seattle Public Libraries on our Community Conversations series. It's always our hope to bring and create intersections between the pieces that we're doing up on our stage and our communities. We know there's a love of Jane Austen and literature and that Seattle Public Libraries is a great partner with us in trying to to celebrate that that love in our city. And here we are with Austen's *Pride* and Jane Austen and *Pride and Prejudice*. All of this coming together on our stage. And we're so happy to have the writers of Austen's *Pride* in conversation with us today. So Amanda Jacobs and Lindsay Warren Baker are going to be our featured interviewees today. And so we'll be looking to you as well to please bring your questions to to us to join the conversation as a community at community conversations. But before we do that, I do want to introduce somebody else who is involved with the production. Katie Dixon is going to kick off her event by singing "When I Fall in Love" from Austen's *Pride*.

[00:02:20] So welcome, Katie. [Singing] When I fall in love.

[00:02:30] Will I know it from the start?

[00:02:34] Love can be the magic spell.

[00:02:38] So how will I begin to tell?

[00:02:50] When I fall in love? If I fall in love. What will love impart?

[00:02:59] Will it change me? Can I be bound by love and still be free when I fall in love?

[00:03:15] We must be of similar mind, his character strong and refined. And, his reputation whatever his station, must be generous, truthful.

[00:03:38] And kind.

[00:03:41] Fate will play a part. If love should be my destiny. Then let the man believe in me.

[00:03:55] When I fall in love, I will give my heart.

[00:04:04] What will be? I cannot guess. What I want is happiness.

[00:04:15] When I fall, if I fall. When I fall in love. [Singing finishes]

[00:04:38] Give it up one more time for Katie Dixon.

[00:04:41] I forgot my notes. Here are my notes here. OK. So now to business. I'm going to invite our our writers up to their seats. And as they come up, I'm going to introduce them. So, Amanda Jacobs, give us a little wave there. Amanda. Hey. Amanda Jacobs grew up in Macon, Georgia, and earned Bachelor in Music Degree in Piano Performance from Wesleyan College with a Doctorate in Education Psych, Educational Psychology. She specializes in Learning Environments in the Arts. Yes. In 2014, the Jane Austen Society of North America chose her as their international visitor. And she spent six weeks in Chawton in the UK. Jane Austen's home composing, performing and producing concerts. Other works besides Austen's *Pride* include *Learning How to Drown*. That sounds exciting. And the *Up Side of Down* other collaborative works include *Daniel*, *Lily* and the *Truth in Beauty*. Jacobs is also recognized for her concert and sacred music composition. Most recently, Charlotte Smith's. *The Song Cycles of Beachy Head*. Please help me welcome Amanda Jacobs. Lindsay Warren Baker is a stage director, writer, teaching artist, acting coach and yoga instructor. Lindsay is an adjunct instructor of opera and an acting coach at the Eastman School of Music. Additional collaborative works include *Lily: A Musical Portrait*, *Truth in Beauty: A Shakespeare Sonnet Project*,

[00:06:20] *Daniel: The Musical*, *All the Buzz*, *Personal Foul*, *The Rendez-Vous* and *Blocked*. Those are all separate projects. You've got to run them together. She has also worked in various capacities with the Geva Theatre Centre, Eastman Opera Theatre, and the Ohio, The

Ohio Light Opera. Why is it that Ohio likes to put the in front of everything? The Ohio State, The Ohio Light... Lindsay, has also attended SUNY Empire State College, received a Masters in Liberal Studies, St. Olaf College and trained at the O'Neill National Theater Institute, Moscow Art Theater, and the Dagara Music Center in Ghana. Please help me welcome Lindsay Warren Baker. And I'm going to give you a microphone. Okay. So, um, I, um, also before we begin, there's another thing that we should do. It is Indigenous Peoples Day here that we celebrate in Seattle. So I just want to acknowledge that we are on the unceded ancestral lands of the Duwamish People. A people that are still here continuing to honor and bring to light their ancient heritage. So, uh, here we go. I just want to kick this off with a question. Why Jane Austen? Why *Pride and*, this kind of three questions, I guess, why Jane Austen? Why *Pride and Prejudice*? Why now?

[00:07:44] Why Jane Austen is because I love Jane Austen. And musicals take a very, very long time to create. And one of the most important aspects for me as an artist is that it's important that I love the material that I'm working on because I need to be able to love it during the worst times. And I need to love it during the best times. What about you, Lindsay?

[00:08:13] I love Jane Austen, not only for her voice as an author. It's so witty and clever and smart. I love her characters. I love her female characters. I love her heroines.

[00:08:28] They are so often ahead of their time in how they navigate the world within the social and cultural rules they exist. And so for me, that's one of the reasons why I love Jane Austen. Why *Pride and Prejudice*? Amanda actually had the original idea to *turn Pride and Prejudice* into a musical. We both loved Jane Austen. We both came to Jane Austen and *Pride and Prejudice* differently. But after she told me about the idea, I was hooked. Do you want to go? More specifically, I think would be interesting for you to talk about why you had the idea in the first place of *Pride and Prejudice*.

[00:09:10] Well, we were at the end of the creative process of *Daniel*, the first piece we wrote together, and we were kind of going our own separate ways. And whenever I'm in a recuperating mode, I tend to watch a lot of movies. And I noticed that I kept putting in the Colin Firth 1995 BBC version and that I kept watching the same scenes over and over again. I was hyper aware that I was like returning to these scenes where nothing was being said. And it was in that moment that I realized that this was the time when we could actually use song and wouldn't it be cool if we could turn it into a musical? So that was kind of the idea for it. And the thing that I wanted more than anything was that, we would create something that that was true to the story, that it wasn't something that was made up or unnatural, but that it was born out of that actual emotional impetus. And so that was kind of what guided us. We wanted to write a musical about it that we wanted to see.

[00:10:24] I do want to ask you more about that process. But, but before we get into that, I'm curious, how did you start writing together? How did you become a writing team?

[00:10:32] Well, we we had a matchmaker. It was Lindsay's mother. And she was actually, they are actually here tonight. But I was I had just started a job as a musical director at a church in Batavia, New York, called St. James Church. And we were I had this idea about a musical outreach program using the story of Daniel and the Lions. And I had written songs and I had kind of a structure of what I wanted, but I didn't know anything about writing the story. And so Nancy, mother Nancy says to me, well, my daughter is in theater. And I you two would just hit it off. And so she introduced us. And we, we did. We had like minds. You can tell more about that, I guess. And the rest is history.

[00:11:24] We worked on *Daniel* together and then we decided to venture into the world of *Pride and Prejudice* and have other projects together as well.

[00:11:34] But yeah, that's that's how we met was because my mom thought that we'd hit it off and she was right, we did in 1997.

[00:11:45] Oh, wow. Yeah. So you both were 10 years old.

[00:11:51] You're so kind.

[00:11:54] It is interesting now to think of telling the story that has so much about trying to find your place within societal strictures. And I wonder if so you started writing this piece in, what, year? 2000. Okay, so you started writing it in 2000. It's been 19 years. And do you find that the meaning of this story or has it surprise you that the meaning or the what the story is how the story is reflecting the world around us? Has that changed at all in this 19 years or surprised you or have you realized new things about the story and what it can mean to people along the way?

[00:12:39] I think the more the meaning of the story to people has, and the love of this story for people, has always been very deep. And whether they've actually read the novel or whether they love the story through adaptation, whether it be movies, mini-series, other stage adaptations. For me, what's been so interesting is to to live and grow with the story for 19 years. One of the special things about our particular adaptation is that Jane Austen is a character in the musical as well. Interacting with her characters, that has been a huge growing process of who is she as a character. Originally she was just a device to get us through the story, but now she is a living, breathing character with her own arc and journey throughout the show, just as the characters are making their way through their story throughout the show. And it's very interesting because when we started writing it and started writing songs, I was actually around the age that Jane Austen was when she wrote the first manuscript, maybe a little little older. But basically our our 19 years is about the same time frame from her very first starting to write *First Impressions* into it being published as *Pride and Prejudice*. So we've kind of lived that creative journey now, too. So our unders..., living with a story for 19 years. You start to get to know the characters differently, examine them differently, the different research that we've done and lectures we've attended and hearing different people's thoughts on it, it adds to our

understanding of it. And I think my love of the characters and the story in Jane Austen has only deepened over time. And I can see more clearly how relevant these stories still are today, 200 years later. And that's what's really interesting. It's always been relevant and it's amazing to me how still relevant it continues to be.

[00:14:41] Well, for me that there are so many layers of the story and there's so many stories within this story that allow us to examine it from different perspectives. And one of the things that I find fascinating is that the core characteristics of human beings have never changed in the two hundred years. There's always going to be a Wickham in our lives. There's always going to be a Mr. Collins in our life. There's always going to be all of these people that we see in this story. And I think one of the things that's been especially wonderful for me through the process with all the good and the bad and the ugly, is that because Jane Austen is a character, it forced me to look at my own creative process and did become hyper aware of how I create. As a composer, as a writer, as a lyricist, as an orchestrator, what whatever it is that I'm creating, as a poet, is I am hyper aware of what it is that I'm feeling, how the creative process actually happened, who actually is in the room with me. When I lose my temper at my family, it's made me hyper aware of who I am as a creative. And that, I think has been a great gift because I can recognize at the moment when inspiration is coming. I can understand at the moment, oh, I need to sit down or oh, I'm really being really mean to my family. I need to stop. It's it's I think that's one of the most wonderful things at a personal level that it has given me. It has also shown me that love really is the most important thing in our life. It really is. An abiding love is something that I love to talk about now, because this story of *Pride and Prejudice*. Yes, it's a wonderful, wonderful, romantic, sexy story. Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. My gosh, we all want that.

[00:16:48] But when it all comes down to when we when we take all the layers of all of that off, what really it comes down to is that if we have the power to make someone happy because we love them, then we should.

[00:17:04] And to me, that is what abiding love is, is that we have the power at every moment of our lives to bring love and happiness to someone, and we just have to make that choice.

[00:17:16] I love that. I love that.

[00:17:21] It does remind me that when I when I had the opportunity to watch one of the run throughs. I am a Jane Austen neophyte. I will be the first person to say that I did not read Jane Austen growing up and I'm being introduced to it now. And it's fascinating. But having a figure, a character, Jane Austen on the stage struggling with the creative process was so engaging and was something not that the story's not engaging too, but that that added element I thought was very was something that, you know, you didn't add zombies. But I was like, this is it's really something to grab onto and kind of humanizes that person, that figure. And what I'm learning about Jane Austen knows that we did lose a lot of apparently her sister burned many of her letters. And so we are kind of piecing together what kind of person, who she was,

exactly. And I'm wondering if you both could talk a little bit about that process, because you do have to make some artistic decisions when it comes to creating this musical.

[00:18:29] One of the things that we did that helped us tremendously, we when we first started, we we wrote a terrible book. We wrote a terrible script. Our first script was really awful. And but we knew that our songs were good. We had explored the characters in songs. So we knew that something was very magical about the songs. What's really interesting, I think, for people to know is that most of the songs that are in this show existed as our very first songs, "Silly Girls", "My Poor Nerves", "Not Romantic", "Fine Eyes". "Fine Eyes" was actually the very first song that we wrote. It still exists all these years later.

[00:19:14] But I've I've kind of lost my train of thought.

[00:19:20] Jane Austen Society was really helpful in helping get us on track. Oh, and so what we we did was we went to the Jane Austen Society, they loved the songs. And then one of the Jane Austen ladies said, "Well, you know, you're not going to know how to tell the story until you actually go to England." So what we did was we visited every place mentioned in the novel and every place where she wrote it. And that began to inform us about who we thought Jane Austen was at the time. It's really interesting to go to her cottage and see the little table she wrote from. It's really interesting to see the little tiny piece of paper to feel like you've actually walked in her footsteps. That's very all very helpful. Would you like to add anything?

[00:20:06] And so actually, when we before we even wrote any songs, one of the first things we did 19 years ago, because the AGM was, you know, like last weekend, every every year in October, the Jane Austen Society of North America holds a three day conference about something related to Jane Austen.

[00:20:24] And in 2000, the conference was a three day weekend about *Pride and Prejudice*. So, you know, what a great opportunity to go to start doing some research and see what people have to say.

[00:20:35] And through attending those, AGMs is finding out that there was actually a local chapter in Rochester, New York, where we lived attending those meetings, going to different book clubs, really doing dramaturgical research in it, including going to England, reading biographies, reading her letters that are the ones that still exist that are published.

[00:20:58] All of those things helped create some idea of who Jane might have been, because there isn't that much known, really. And so.

[00:21:11] But being informed and being guided by the spirit of her work, her authorship and what we did know about her and by creative process, right, helped us to create a version of her that could be believable that we think could be believable, that, you know, people hunger to know about this woman because there isn't that much to know. So by taking certain events in

her life that scholars have posited about her using some artistic license to interweave those those facts with her story gave us a way to create an Austen that we believed could write this magnificent piece of literature. And so if that answers your question with all those things, hopefully that's how we set out about to try and create a character of Jane Austen rooted in rooted in research. But also that's interesting to watch on a stage because it is musical theater after all.

[00:22:14] And I do have a related question. So, you know, this is kind of discussing how we're going to characterize Jane Austen like in the book. But then how do you decide what Jane Austen is going to how she's going to sing? You know, what was your process as maybe as as a songwriter, composer, you know, to kind of find the sound of Jane Austen? Because I don't know if anybody's listened to the Regency era music. It's not my cup of tea. But you've created this lush, you know, score that just seems to to be so alive and filled with spirit and love.

[00:22:53] You know, Amanda's created a term for the sound of the score, which I love. So I'm going to. Well, I'm gonna say it right. Yes. Modern romantic with a big R.. Right.

[00:23:04] So it's it's, um. So it has contemporary harmonies. Right. Things that resonate with an with an audience today. But it's rooted in, it's rooted in form. It's rooted in at times. It's inspired by classical sounds that it has that sweeping romantic feeling. So that for us, that becomes the sound of a modern Jane Austen. Right. So that you can still believe it. It's what we would term a Broadway legit sound.

[00:23:34] So as opposed to pop voices. Right. It's something rooted more in a natural, resonant voice like you heard Katie sing earlier, but still has that that Broadway power of belting when necessary. You know that we all, you know, get so moved by as well. And so by interweaving that kind of classical structure with the I think the grandness of a romantic music with contemporary modern harmonies, that's.

[00:24:06] And it just happened on its own because we were trying to find the characters in song for us, how we thought they might sound, what might they sing, and how that, how does that fit within the world? Because we want to create a believable world of Regency England. But again, seen through a lens of of today.

[00:24:27] Well, the only other thing that I have to say about it is working with our musical director, Matt Perri. He said that my initials, my initials are AJ.

[00:24:36] And he said that that, that stands for accidentally jazzy, Yeah there are some minor sixth chords in it.

[00:24:46] So it really is it superimposing both classical period and romantic period technique into modern sound. And one of the things that first helped us find Austen's voice was the creaking door when we went to Chawton that was in 2003 when we went on the research trip,

the last place we visited was Chawton house. The cottage where she lived and on the door it said creaking door. Well, the smallest interval that we have in music is the minor second. And so that was how we began was with the minor second – that was to sound like the creaking door. And it was from that that everything grew out. And then it was just like, okay, for me again, this is one of those hyper aware moments is what happens when I'm creating well, there's a circularness inside of the mind that goes around and around and around. So you'll hear titted it it it it it it did it it it it it - that represents the circular motion of thought. And then with that was how we began to piece things like that together or. This. Yeah. As you're writing, so how do you musicalize those thoughts? And that's how they came about. And then what's interesting and where does it come from in your gut to have an emotional reaction to sound and how does it sound when you place this against that?

[00:26:25] One other thing that's interesting about that, too, because the opening number used to be called “The Creaking Door” because it was all about Austen, she can write until because what it said was that she wouldn't allow the hinges of the door to be oiled so that she could hear when people were coming. So because she she you know, it was in her dining parlor. Right. And people could come in so that she could cover up her work, you know, so that, you know, people wouldn't think she was being inappropriate by writing beyond letters. Right. By actually being an author. And we've found that really, really fascinating. But, you know, along the way. Well, who wants to hear someone sing about a door? What does that really have to do with anything dramatically? And so we were able to keep a lot of those ideas. But ultimately, so that interval of that minor second became the choices theme that now permeates the entire show, because throughout it, Jane Austen has to make choices whether or not she's even going to look at this manuscript again. What choices do her characters have? What choices is she going to make about what path they take throughout their journey? Is she going to send this manuscript off to the publisher? Is she going to choose to actually be a writer? Is she? How does she want to choose to live her life? So we were able to retain a lot of those original musical impulses and just have them evolve over time. So instead of it being about a creaking door. What's interesting, though, is that the first lyric was choices and it was, “choices, voices, characters longing to live and be free.” But now we don't talk about the voices because when people thought it was ghostly.

[00:28:07] So it's evolved over time.

[00:28:08] But it's really interesting how those nuggets and and initial impulses can stay with you throughout 19 years and just have them mature and grow into something that really then serves the piece.

[00:28:21] Well, let's unpack that for a little bit. So 19 years. What happens over the course of 19 years? What like. So where are you in the process now? You know, or maybe talk a little bit about what's happened to the piece throughout the years and where are you now?

[00:28:36] So we I mean, we spent three to four years writing songs, writing a really terrible script.

[00:28:44] And then by choice, though. By choice, yes. Well, because we were trying, right?

[00:28:47] We didn't at first think it was terrible. But then we realized it was and we were honest about it. We went to England.

[00:28:54] We had the inspiration to include Austen as a character and then came back really excited to start writing the script. At the time, I was working as the production stage manager at Eastman School of Music for the Opera Program and the head of the opera program, Steve Daigle, was you know, I'd been telling him about writing these songs and what we were doing, and he was very interested in it. And so then after we got back from our trip to England, he said, well, how's it coming?

[00:29:23] And I said, well, it's it's to great. You know, we had this great we had this great trip and it's coming along and we're getting good ideas.

[00:29:30] He goes, well, if you finish writing it, we'll do it in opera workshop. So we had, what, two months to finish writing it. It was maybe a third of the way done.

[00:29:40] So we got to work and we got it written.

[00:29:43] And the first opera, the first workshop production in a black box at Eastman School of Music was three acts and four hours long. And we really told the story of *Pride and Prejudice*. So, you know, one day we could probably do a musical mini-series if we wanted to.

[00:30:02] And so from there, I mean, as probably any writer goes through, it's a series of rewrites. There's a lot of rewriting always involved. We had because we were writing for classical voices. We really were able to write for the voice. Steven Daigle invited us to do it at the Ohio Light Opera in 2006. And then after that, we went into New York for readings. And that's when it started to transition more out of operetta land into musical theater. And so it's been a series of readings, workshops, productions of various sizes throughout all of this time with different creative people involved. At some point.

[00:30:50] A production up at a high school here, in the Puget Sound Region. Yes.

[00:30:53] And in the period after we were at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in 2011. After that after we went to - was before NYMTF? Yeah. Oh, that's right was before NYMTF. It was between cause we weren't sure if that will can be a problem. That's right. Yeah, because we have been accepted as the next link piece in the New York music. Now it's to the New York Musical Festival. Yeah. Because we had a website just to have it out there and Edmonds Heights was interested in doing it. And so they did production and came and saw the one at

the Fifth Avenue. A bunch of them have been coming to see it because we remember we met one of the students who had been in that. She works at the art museum. Yeah.

[00:31:35] So. So, yeah, it's just incredible all of the things that have occurred over time.

[00:31:40] So we've had a couple of different high school productions. We worked with amateur actors and singers. We've worked with professional actors and singers, different creative teams, different producers.

[00:31:50] It was at NYMTF we met our current lead producer and our director joining up with the Fifth Avenue.

[00:31:58] We've added on our music director, Matt Perri. We're working with Lisa Shriver as choreographer. And it's a wonderful team. And so it's just yeah, it's all it's a long time and lots of different meetings of people and circumstances and a lot of hard work. And every time we think it's not gonna go anywhere, something happens and Jane Austen won't let us let it go.

[00:32:21] Not done yet. So you came to the 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle. You just walked in. The piece was done. Started rehearsing. Oh, apparently that's not true. [Laughter] We are in we haven't had we have performances, but we're not at opening night yet, which is on Friday.

[00:32:37] Right. Correct. And what the show was at the soft opening on the fourth is completely different from what we're going to see tomorrow night at the night after. Because every time we have an audience, that's where we learn the most. We find out what is resonating with them. We find out what isn't working. We're finding out what isn't clear. We're finding out what works for the actor. We're finding out all of this information. And then we receive notes. We receive notes from our director. We receive notes from Bill and Aaron. We take our own notes. We also make our own observations and then we write, we compose, we fix, we reexamine. How many e-mails did you send today

[00:33:25] of all the scene rewrites? Yeah. Exactly. And this morning it was about revisiting some of the piano vocal scores and then getting it to copy and orchestration. And it's just it's not ending and it won't stop until we freeze it, which will be, I think, Wednesday night.

[00:33:43] There's a whole there's a small army of people that when you decide to change that chord in that one measure. That's right. Snaps into into action and implements it. What is it like to kind of know that, you know or to see your piece up on on the Fifth Avenue stage and know that it has is this two thousand seat house? And what is it like to go from the page to seeing?

[00:34:10] Well, it's the Fifth Avenue. It's like I feel like Elizabeth did when she saw Pemberley for the first time. It's like - I could have been mistress of this place? It's like, oh, my gosh, it's really overwhelming.

[00:34:22] It's this has been one of the most positive experiences I've ever had. The Fifth Avenue is absolutely wonderful. And everybody knows what they are doing. Fishing for dirt.

[00:34:33] I wasn't sure. I don't think we're gonna get a compliment like this. You know, it's really fantastic.

[00:34:38] It's why it's one of the best theaters in the country. I really believe it. Our, our 19 years of having all these productions have we've had many multiple experiences, some of them good and some of them not so good. And this it's been it's been wonderful to come into this first class theater. And to have all the support you need. Because when I make a change, there's somebody to help me with a piano vocal score. There's someone who is looking who's got my back so that I can work on scene work and then I can go to the piano vocal score and write that and get that and then fix the template for the orchestration and do the orchestration, then get it to copy, then get it to the then somebody else to get the charts to the musicians. It's I mean, to have that kind of support is makes it possible to make positive change, to make the show the best that it possibly can be. And everybody is working with that mindset. We want our show to be the absolute best it can be. We want our audiences to love it and enjoy it. So, yeah, it's been great. What do you think, Lindsay? I concur.

[00:35:51] I feel like you've already been speaking to this question already, but I one thing I did write down, though, is was what have you learned along the way?

[00:35:58] So is there anything about the process of writing a new musical that just even the last few weeks here that has kind of hit you?

[00:36:10] There's always something to learn. Every there's so many things that are universal about how theater gets made. But there's also a lot of specifics depending on the organization that you work with or the level of of theater making that is occurring. So there's always something there's always something new to learn about how to be a positive collaborator, about how to advocate for your artistry and your intent.

[00:36:45] Um, about.

[00:36:47] Yeah. I mean, those are some of the bit about letting go about not holding on to things so tightly because we have a whole another show or two on a floor in a trunk. Right.

[00:37:01] And.

[00:37:03] And we love it all, but we also know that we can create.

[00:37:08] Anything. And so.

[00:37:13] Yeah. So it's just it's learned. But so that's learning, too. Is that what I what I have found is that that's another thing that Matt our music director said. This is a good opportunity to to practice non-attachment. And it's true because particularly as you're, you're heading into commercial theater. Right. If the goal is Broadway and it becomes a for-profit venture. Right. That's a whole other thing. And you don't know when you're gonna get the call saying, OK. Opportunity. We have to go. Take it, drop everything. Let's go. So there's a certain it's a roller coaster and learning how to be flexible and go for that ride. That was challenging at first, but also learning how to not put your life on hold so that you can not be stuck waiting for something to happen and getting depressed when it isn't, you know, so just still living your full life and then being able to then say, OK, now I have to make adjustments because something is happening. I mean, there's a lot there's a lot that I've learned over the years.

[00:38:20] Well, I think the thing that's so astonishing to me is.

[00:38:28] The people. You know, it takes people to make theater and and we're all human.

[00:38:37] And that I've I think I've learned that the most important thing that you can do in this business is to practice kindness. Show kindness. Because that seems to make the best theater. I've also learned that it's important to empower people. And and to how you do that or how I've learned to that is to recognize their gifts. And it's amazing coming into the Fifth Avenue because this is top notch theater.

[00:39:10] And to see the level of talent, the level of capability, the the level of.

[00:39:20] Of professionalism, it's really astonishing. And to let them do it, they're there to do it. And that's been a wonderful thing to learn along the way is that's how you let people do what they love to do.

[00:39:40] And one other thing that I have learned along the lines of, you know, kind of embracing people's humanity and who they are is that these iconic characters that we love and *Pride and Prejudice*, seeing them come alive on stage and particularly with with actors who really kind of dig in to who these characters are as people. That was one thing that really has astonished me over the years, is that these characters come alive in such a way and they resonate because you can believe that they are people right. With their their their flaws and their talents. And I remember that I remember the day where I stopped. You know, we've been working on the musical for a long time. But I stopped looking at Elizabeth and Darcy as characters and all of a sudden I saw people and that was astonishing. And it made me cry because it was it was just unbelievable. I was like, oh, my gosh. That's why that's why this story is so resonant. Jane Austen wrote about people, you know. And yes, some of them are over the top. But but we know those people. And so that's what's so wonderful is when when that humanity is really embraced and brought to life on stage, that it's no longer just a storybook. Yeah. You're you're seeing a glimpse of life. So that was that's been very powerful for me. I think.

[00:41:13] I do want to make sure we have time to answer any questions so y'all can get your, uh, Fresh Air, Terry Gross hard-hitting questions ready. But, so before we turn it over to the audience, is there any part of the show like that, you know, in the past week that you've seen that you just are really like I am. I love this moment. You know, is there a moment in the show without too many spoilers, I guess. But is there a moment in the show that you just... The portrait song.

[00:41:40] That's what I'll say for me. It gets me every time.

[00:41:48] I love it. Which one of your children is your favorite? Is what I'm asking.

[00:41:54] I guess the thing that I love is that that I loved about this production so far is that I'd love to hear the laughter.

[00:42:05] I love to hear the laughter of the audience that that's the most thrilling and it happens a lot. But to know that this genius woman, Jane Austen, still has the power to make people laugh. We need joy in our lives. We need beauty in our lives. And here there's something so moving. Every time.

[00:42:26] I watch an audience or watch the show that I'm going, wow, you know. Jane Austen did it again.

[00:42:36] That's so interesting because I think that was my, again as a Jane Austen neophyte, my prejudice against I think this world before was that it was – okay I've watching a lot of *Great British Bake Off*, but it was kind of a stodgy kind of world. But kind of. Yeah. Your piece, definitely. It's amazing to hear the audience and to remember that this is satire and this is that, you know, that there is humor. And that was that was one of our Jane Austen strong points.

[00:43:06] So, um, I have a few other questions, but I do want to make sure we have time for anybody that has any burning questions for. Oh, we got a question right there in the back. Okay. You go ahead and shout it out, and I will repeat it into the mike. So.

[00:43:37] Well, what's interesting for what was interesting for us is to realize when we got started on this, how many and how many have continued since then, there are quite a few musical adaptations, there are straight play adaptations, there's musical theater adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. So if you, you know, Google *Pride and Prejudice* musical, you'll come out around at least probably, you know, half a dozen or so. So. And part of that's because the material is in public domain. Right. So you don't need to secure the rights to use it.

[00:44:08] That is one thing. What was interesting is the first time we presented our songs to the Jane Austen Society of North America, right before we presented the songs, a paper was given about how no adaptation of a Jane Austen novel will ever satisfy a Janeite. Right?

[00:44:27] Like, oh, great. Now here's some songs.

[00:44:31] So we're like, oh, OK. So we got up, we still have to do it.

[00:44:36] So we got up and we presented and two of the singers who were with us who we're playing, Jane and Bingley sang. "Isn't She Wonderful?" That's still in the show.

[00:44:45] They finished and the whole room of 200 some odd people went – Ahhh. We said okay, thank goodness, we're onto something, because if that presentation had not gone well, we probably would have stopped because these are people who know their Austen who are passionate about their Austen and have opinions about their Austen. And so. So that was always very important to us. And then at the same time, it's even more important to us that people who haven't ever read it, who may have some other opinion, that they might think it's dusty or stuffy or whatever, because it just isn't their cup of tea that if they get dragged along to the theater by their partner or by their friend for a date night or an outing, and they're not expecting to enjoy it, that they're going to follow the story and that they will enjoy it. And they may even want to read it, because that's also we wanted to write a musical that we wanted to see, but we also wanted to write a musical that would encourage people to actually pick up the book. What how did what did they do? How did they do that? And then once they pick it up and say, oh, my gosh, look at what they chose to do to tell this story would and they would get so much more because now they have the whole novel to read.

[00:45:59] So that's my answer to that question. Anything else you want to add to that?

[00:46:04] Well, one of the things that we did do was when we did get pushback was primarily for from the Jane Austen Society, is we always looked at it as something that would help us because we didn't have we weren't working with the theater at the time. We were just doing this for the love of it. We just wanted to write a musical. Right. So every time someone had an opinion and they were speaking from a place of knowledge, we saw that as an opportunity to really use that knowledge. How could we use that piece of knowledge to help our show? So we looked at that pushback as something that was really helpful and we still continue to do that. If somebody isn't clear about something, we've taken that note. We're going to work with that and chew on that as best we can and see what we can do to make that note go away.

[00:46:52] So that's how we've our attitude has been.

[00:46:59] Any other questions. Yes? What's next?

[00:47:03] Well, that's still being determined. And our producer is here in the room and we don't know we just know that there's going to be a life after this and we're very hopeful about what that life can be. The show is in and it has reached a very high level now. And we're in the nitty gritty of the revision process. We're really refining things to the Nth Degree. I mean, the

changing of the word, the changing of a phrase, the changing of a harmony. We're being very specific now. So the possibility for big things ahead is really very possible and we're very excited about that.

[00:47:54] Is the shows sold out? It is not sold out. No, it is not.

[00:47:57] It's a very big theater. But we have heard rumors that the numbers are very, very good. And we have heard also that the Fifth Avenue is very, very pleased with those numbers. We know there is an opportunity for people to see it.

[00:48:12] And we're just happy. That it's doing so well.

[00:48:16] And if you've already seen, like we've heard it, they're making changes nightly. Up until Friday, which is our press opening. So if you're really into it, you know, and want to see how things evolve along the way. That's kind of a fun thing to do.

[00:48:30] Yeah. In the middle of last week, we added a new song, a scene went away and a song went in.

[00:48:36] So, you know, if you saw the show at the first preview a couple Fridays ago, the show you would come to tomorrow night on Tuesday is not going to be you know, that was its own original show. And the following Saturday was its own original show, because that's what's so interesting about the preview process. And what's so admirable about everyone, the actors and the production team and the creative team is that we're constantly working. So there's rehearsal from 12 to 5:00 and then you do a show at at 7:30 or 8 o'clock at night and you're implementing changes that you worked on that day. So it's it's an unending process. So every single performance has been different up to this point and it won't really be. I mean, our our creative work will freeze, I think, Wednesday or Thursday, but that the production itself freezes for its official opening on Friday.

[00:49:25] And then the show runs and we can let the actors do their jobs and run with it.

[00:49:31] How are you even here right now?

[00:49:35] Set an alarm, and ran up the hill – to make sure we got here on time. Because you were working on notes. What I like to say opportunities like this are really wonderful because it does let us get out of from in front of the computer to actually step into some fresh air to enjoy the city, to meet the community, because that can be challenging. You know, particularly, you know, this has actually been a beautiful fall. There has not been nearly as much rain as I thought there might be. And and so, yes, a lot of the times we're stuck indoors for it. So it's always wonderful when we get a chance to step outside. And it's important to take breaks because then you can come back fresh to the work with a clear a clear palette, a clear mind

and see something. If you've been stuck on something now, maybe you might see it clearly where you had and get an idea that you weren't able to have before.

[00:50:28] Right? This is the final. Yeah. The final push here. Yeah.

[00:50:32] Sure. So Caroline Bingley sings a couple of letters and we wrote a new letter for her. So there's if you saw only two letters, there's now a letter in the middle of those other two letters. So now is Caroline sings three letters.

[00:50:50] But if you want to know what she said.

[00:50:53] Well, they have an amazing deal here, too, where if you bought a ticket, you can go the day of. Look at you sell the program. Well, I was like that's awesome. Like, I didn't know about that deal. You'll see it again for half off or something the day of.

[00:51:07] That's a cool. So keep that in mind. Yes. Yes, please.

[00:51:14] So is there something there is there something that you're.

[00:51:17] There's a character who used to sing, who no longer sings. Actually, there's several characters who used to sing that no longer sing. But the most recent casualty who no longer sings. And that was actually over over this process.

[00:51:31] Mr. Collins no longer sings.

[00:51:35] He sings in our hearts. He does have a beautiful voice. And it was not it was not because of Eric at all. Eric did a great job. He's fantastic. What the challenging part.

[00:51:46] And and in fact, in our earliest four hour version, Mr. Collins sang a lot. We wrote a lot of songs for Mr. Collins. Yeah. He sang about. Yeah. He sang he and Charlotte sang a duet, "It Suits Us Very Well". They sang about going over to Lady Catherine's house. The latest - he sang his proposal to Elizabeth. He sang a song about Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

[00:52:14] Yeah, we've got we're like, we should do a cabaret night of the lost songs of Mr. Collins. And Eric would jump on that. Yeah, right. But what we learned and this is another thing, right?

[00:52:24] Practice, not attachment and listen and try. We love hearing Mr. Collins sing. And we particularly loved our song that we wrote for him about Lady Catherine. It's it's in the form of a hymn. So because he's a clergyman, right? It's a hymn to Lady Catherine. But we heard from multiple people for multiple years that it wasn't working. And it took until this process for us to really understand why Mr. Collins singing doesn't work. It it stops the show in not the right way. Right. It stops because all Mr. Collins can do is proclaim. Right. There's nothing for him to

sing that advances the plot really at all, even in proposing to Elizabeth. You know, she's going to say no. And, you know, she's going to say no multiple times. So what's the point really, when there's so many other things that you could watch happen? So that was ultimately why we chose to cut his songs and that but because we tried having him sing different songs at different places, it helped us show how he could just have a book scene and have it not feel like it stalled out or dipped or anything like that. So it was very useful, but it did honestly took us a few years to to let go of the need for Mr. Collins to sing.

[00:53:56] Is there anything else you want to add to that about other material or Mr. Collins in particular?

[00:54:01] Well, I mean, the gardeners used to sing. Charlotte used to sing "He Must Be in Love". Yeah, the Charlotte used to sing, "Not Romantic". Lydia used to sing about her wedding to describe her wedding. Caroline Bingley used to sing about what an accomplished woman was.

[00:54:21] Yeah. With her sister Louisa. Mm hmm. And Mr. Darcy had "Get Me to London". I mean we could literally have an opera. If we did everything. Yeah. Lady Catherine sang about chickens.

[00:54:44] But I guess we could have.

[00:54:45] When she comes to visit Elizabeth's to tell her off. She sang, "You Know Why I'm Here, Miss Bennett". That was a song. But Lady Catherine is a character who doesn't sing because what is her music? You know, Lady Catherine doesn't. She never learned to play.

[00:55:03] She would be a great proficient, but she's not. So, yeah.

[00:55:07] So you have to start to decide, you know, who are the characters that really have to burst into song because there's so much contained within them that makes them sing. That was also an interesting process to figure out where in the show Darcy starts to sing because we used to have him start to sing earlier. But now you'll notice or might not. He doesn't sing until he gets to the proposal at the end of act one. So you'll see him standing there at the Netherfield Ball like a curmudgeon while the whole ensemble is singing around him.

[00:55:38] But until he has something to sing about, he won't, right, because his heart isn't open enough to do that. So and his his proposal is a song that isn't really a song. Right. So his evolution through song is really interesting through the show. That was an interesting process to discover.

[00:55:55] Well, that's great. Yeah. Thank you for pointing that out. And the how strategic, you know, music can be to kind of reveal things because that is kind of an intimate gesture in

musical theater - is that impulse to sing. We have time for a couple more questions if there out there. I have a question in the world of *Pride and Prejudice*. Who do you most identify with?

[00:56:25] Oh, man.

[00:56:29] Oh, I thought this was going to be an easy question. [Laughter]

[00:56:34] Well, I mean, the reason I got excited about working on the project in the first place is because I want to be an Elizabeth Bennet, right. Like that was like one day I need to be a Jane Austen heroine. That was something in one of my acting teachers said, you know, as you're trying to find monologues, auditions and things like that, you know, who is a character that you would always want to play regardless of your type of work? You know, regardless of gender, regardless of type. Who is a character you would want to play? And where I landed was okay. Either Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* or a Jane Austen heroine, that's who I would want to be. So that's what drove me to the project in the first place. But I think there's something to relate to in all of the characters. So I think there's a little bit of me in everybody and I. And I love them all. I love them all because I can also recognize when I'm being ridiculous or being rude or, you know, because, again, they're all different, all these different facets of humanity. So that's why that's why I can't pick one, even though I can say there is the one that drew me to it.

[00:57:39] Well, because of the length of time for me, I think when I started this project, I think I was Charlotte Lucas in many respects. I was a.

[00:57:53] And I freed myself and I. I believe that I started to identify more with Elizabeth Bennet.

[00:58:01] So. And then in the process of creating Austen Austen's character, I began to see myself more as her. So I think it's at different phases of our life that we can become those those strengths of character. I'm very glad that I did break free. You know, in my own personal life and and said no, basically no to society and became my own woman. And I think that that's what I became. Elizabeth Bennet and then traveling those years. I think that I became more Austen. So that's who I identify with most. As far as the male characters, I think. I've definitely identify with all of them. I think there's times when I am amiable and fun and fun loving. I also think that I am also very judgmental and once my opinion, once lost, is lost forever. I think I've become Darcy. But I think that they all teach me something.

[00:59:06] You can also take a BuzzFeed quiz if anybody is wondering about themselves.

[00:59:13] Yeah, Bob.

[00:59:16] You know, it's funny because I had this thought earlier as Lindsay was talking, but there's something really amazing about creativity. And when I create song, or when I create

music. There is a sense of that I'm very privileged. I feel very privileged when I create a song or create finish a song or finish a sketch of a song, because I realize that I have had the ability to pull something out of one realm of thought and translate it into a realm. In this realm and and that I am the first person who has done that. And there is a sense of that, I feel the privilege of that and a gratitude of sorts in that creative process. So for me, that's what I've noticed over the years in working with it. And when you're working with another genius alive or dead, in this case Jane Austen, you have such great admiration and respect and love for what she gave to the world.

[01:00:26] It occurs to me that we're really privileged today to have you two sitting here and having a conversation with us, not only because you're just amazing creative artists, but also because it's kind of rare to see a female identifying writing team in the world of musical theater that, you know, is is is, you know, creating and given opportunities to put things up on stage. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about cause kind of that the landscape and how you fit into it.

[01:01:01] Well, I I'm an accidental composer. Not only am I accidentally jazzy, but I was an accidental composer. I never, ever thought about what how identified or what it was.

[01:01:12] I just wanted to create, you know, I didn't even think about it. It was only through the process that I began to encounter any kind of resistance as if it was just always the love of of what I was doing that drove. So I became more aware of it as people told me that I did not realize that there are less than 1 percent women composers in this world. It's like, oh, my gosh, really? Because I was too busy creating to recognize that. I didn't realize that there were no women orchestrators. You know, it's like, oh, my gosh. Well, I I don't.

[01:01:48] I just did it because there was just this need to do it.

[01:01:56] So then when you encounter someone saying that, you know, whether whether it is because of some sort of conscious or unconscious bias or whatever, that's that's when it kind of hits you in the face and say, oh, well, is it because of that or is it because I'm you just don't know me, right? Because there is also that element of being new to the scene. And so much of the performing arts is about connections. Right. Because people you go to school with, those are people you're going to create with in the future, people that you work with on one show that might ultimately land you the opportunity of another show. Right. So much of it. It's about relationships. And so when you're trying to enter into. Look at us. We wrote our show because I was a stage manager at a music conservatory. So it it is all about that. And so what I appreciate so much are the people who recognize what we have to offer and who say we want to give you a platform for doing that, for sharing your talents, for bringing stories to the stage in whatever capacity that might be. So I'm grateful for that. But yeah, I mean, I have to say, I'm fortunate that I was raised in a family of peoples that you love, that do it the best you can. You know, there wasn't, you know, occasionally maybe the practical, well, how are you going to make a living? But for the most part, though, it's like we recognize what motivates you, drives

you, makes you happy. And so we're going to provide you the tools to be the best that you can be in that. And that is not the case for everyone. And so I'm very grateful for that as well. And so it's because of things like that when the thing that you're just doing that, it's like, oh, oh, isn't it fortunate that I haven't experienced certain resistances, but then it does in a way.

[01:03:54] It's like it's like, oh. But then when you face them, you face them. Right. You have to work your way through that. So, yeah, it's really it's very interesting.

[01:04:01] But I am I'm grateful and I'm proud to be a female artist and to have the opportunity to be here and to collaborate with another fantastic female artist and fantastic creative team and producer and all those things, you know, women making it happen.

[01:04:19] Oh, my last question is, do you have any advice for people that, young people or otherwise that just want to start writing musicals or want to jump into their own process?

[01:04:34] Well, we were actually just speaking with a group of students before one of the shows the other day, and they asked a similar question, right. And it's so funny because you often hear from artists who are like, if you if you can think of anything else you'd love do you should do that and not go into the arts. I can't imagine my life without them. You know, I've thought and I've done other things right. Yeah. I've done other jobs to help make an income and support my life and everything.

[01:05:01] But I I can't not.

[01:05:05] Be in the arts, it feeds my soul and I feel like I'm contributing to the world in a hopefully a positive way in bringing important stories to the stage. Whether I'm stage managing, whether I'm directing, whether I'm writing, teaching, whatever. And.

[01:05:22] And I loved what Amanda had to say to them, too. And I don't even remember what it was that I said, oh, well, I think it was something about being happy is like.

[01:05:34] Do you want it to to be happy? Do you want to be happy? If you want to be happy, it can be hard. But would you much rather have happiness than for it to be, you know, easy and unhappy? You know, I want to be happy more than anything in my life. I want to be happy. And it doesn't take much to be happy. It doesn't take a lot of money to be happy. It doesn't take anything much to be happy. But, you know, if you can have an easier life with all the money in the world, but you will be unhappy if you're not doing what your heart tells you to do. And that's why I say that in my life, I started from a Charlotte Lucas standpoint of being very comfortable. But I was unhappy. And it was only through choosing and following my heart and becoming the composer that I wanted to become, the artist that I wanted to become, that I became happy. And yeah, it wasn't it wasn't easy. It still isn't easy. But I'm happy. And I'd much rather have a happy life than the unhappiness of ease.

[01:06:39] I love how that rhymes with what you said earlier about abiding love, you know. And then the choice to to love. And the choice to be happy. Yeah.

[01:06:49] And with that then on the practical side, I would say take advantage of every opportunity that you can to educate yourself, to learn. And it's not just about learning how how theater gets made. I mean learn backstage, learn on stage, learn as much as you can because it will it'll help you. But also just like be a human in the world, you know, at. Know what's going on in the world. If you're if you're interested in studying the arts, well, you know what? Take a science class, you know, learn about other things, because that's also what informs you in your craft. You never know where inspiration is going to strike. So the more experiences you have, the more that just feeds you as a whole person.

[01:07:35] And yeah. So I'd say, you know, just go for it and do it the best you can be the best you can be.

[01:07:42] Well, Lindsay and Amanda, thank you so much for joining us tonight. And being, uh, having being in conversation with us and letting us into your process, we hope to see so many of you at *Austen's Pride* if you already seen it come back again.

[01:07:57] It's going be a different show. And Bob, did you have any last things that you need to. Okay. Well, we'll see you all at the. Thank you so much to The Seattle Public Library. And Bob. Oh, um.

[01:08:09] And, uh, also to Katie Dixon for, um, the beautiful performance.

[01:08:17] And I will say thank you to to our staff. Connie and Larkin for being here as well. And to all of you, our audience. Um, thank you. We'll see you at the next one for *Bliss*. Just keep an eye on the on those, uh, Seattle Public Library schedule. And let's give it one more time for, uh, Amanda and Lindsay.

[01:08:33] Thank you so much for having us. Have a great evening, everybody.

[01:08:42] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening