



A Brief Biography of

Jane Austen

Jane Austen is one of England's most famous female authors, and yet she was not publicly acknowledged for her writing until after her death. She wrote six novels during her lifetime and her work continues to captivate readers 200 years after her death. Her novels include *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, on which the musical *Austen's Pride* is based. She also wrote a series of short works, collectively called *The Juvenilia*, and several unfinished works.

Austen was born in Hampshire, England on December 16, 1775. She was the seventh child of Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen. The Austens were a tight-knit family, and Jane was particularly close with her only sister, Cassandra, who was three years older. Austen and her sister were primarily educated at home where her father, a country clergyman, had an extensive library and indulged his daughters' love for reading. As a result, both girls developed their literacy talents despite the lack of a formal education.

Austen began writing as a child and her first works were comic stories, now referred to as the *Juvenilia*. She had an interest in drama and comedy and often staged theatrical productions for her family. Her first novella was called *Lady Susan* and was written in epistolary form (as a series of letters). This first work was published long after her death.

In 1795, when she was 20 years old, Austen met Tom Lefroy. In letters to her sister, she wrote

about spending time with Lefroy and suggested romantic feelings for him, however the relationship did not last. Jane Austen never married, but she did receive one proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither, the younger brother of a family friend. The engagement was short lived. Austen accepted his offer of marriage, and the following day changed her mind and rescinded her promise. This was significant as marriage was the only way for a young woman to gain independence from her family.

In her early twenties, Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility* (originally titled "Elinor and Marianne") and *Pride and Prejudice* (originally "First Impressions"). Her father sent a letter offering the manuscript of "First Impressions" to a publisher, but the offer was promptly rejected. In 1811, when Austen was 35 years old, *Sense and Sensibility* was published. The author was identified as "a Lady". *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813 followed by *Mansfield Park* in 1814 and *Emma* in 1815. The title pages of each book did not include her name.

In 1815, Austen began writing *Persuasion*. However her health was beginning to fail when she completed the novel the following year. In 1817 Austen moved with her sister to Winchester to be near her doctor. She died on July 18 1817. *Persuasion* was published in December 1817 along with *Northanger Abbey*. A "Biographical Notice" was written by her brother, Henry. In the notice Jane Austen was, for the first time, identified as the author of each of her novels.



Amanda Jacobs

Published in 1813, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is celebrated today as one of the most popular—and most frequently adapted—novels in English literature. Despite a wealth of variations that allow aficionados to vehemently argue for their preferred film and television adaptations or literary sequels and spin-offs, we have yet to see a definitive musical production for the stage.

Enter *Austen's Pride - A New Musical of Pride and Prejudice*, a labor of love with book, music, and lyrics by Lindsay Warren Baker and Amanda Jacobs. We recently had the opportunity to chat with Baker and Jacobs about the work.

"In its first production waaaaaay back in the beginning, the show was originally three acts and four hours long!" Jacobs laughs. "We really told the story of *Pride and Prejudice*!"

"When we first started writing, Jane Austen wasn't in the show," Baker says. Now, Jane Austen is one of the central characters in this telling of *Pride and Prejudice*. In fact, it's Jane Austen's role in the musical that distinguishes *Austen's Pride* from other adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*.

"We made a lot of discoveries through trial and error," Jacobs says. "Originally, we placed the story as if she were newly writing it. But over time, we found that if we put it in a place where she was revising, we could incorporate references to her life."

Jacobs smiles. "What I think we tried most to honor was the spirit of her words and story. By choosing to portray her as the creator writing her novel, we show a real artist with real fears and real talent, struggling to make her mark on the world and, surprisingly, to find joy through the process of discovering something even greater than what she was writing."

"I think that knowing the story as well as I do from all these years of working on the show has taught me so much more than I ever imagined," Jacobs says. "What Austen teaches me through her writing and revising her story is that LOVE is the most important thing we can write about. I believe it with all my heart. To quote one of the last lyrics of the show, 'Love is wonderful; it is glorious! It's never, ever wrong.'"

Writing Austen's Pride

A Musical Love Affair with a Novel

Baker agrees. "The love story of Elizabeth Bennett and Fitzwilliam Darcy is timeless because it recognizes that people can be unapologetically themselves and still have the capacity to reflect and grow. That love can bring out the best in us, and that unconditional love is the greatest gift we can give one another.

"The most important thing I've learned in this journey," she adds, "is that you have to know and own who you are. There is always room to grow and learn, but you also need to claim your talent and possess inner-strength to face the rollercoaster and stand up for yourself. By the end of *Austen's Pride*, through humor and heartache, Jane makes a decision about who she is and what she wants to be. We see that choice in her body of work. She owns her voice and that is something we should all strive to do."

Bridget Morgan

Associate Director of Branding and Communications



Lindsay Warren Baker

Who's Who?

A family tree of *Pride and Prejudice*

