

Emma Spooner

Austen the ...Musical???

Austentacious is wild, chaotic, random, definitely not Jane Austen and lets say it...ostentatious. It is also Hilarious! I'm not sure what I expected from a musical about putting on the play *Pride and Prejudice*, but whatever it was certainly wasn't what I got. Austentacious was better than I ever could have imagined. Of course I also enjoy *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and the numerous other off-shoots of Austen's novels, not as much as the real thing, lets be serious, but I am a pop-culture fan; purists might be somewhat disgruntled by the occasional bear or pirate who appears in the script.

The plot, such as it is, involves five actors, well make it three actresses, one pot smoking student looking for credit for his support group, and the boyfriend of actress #1 who is there simply to help her audition, trying out for an incompetent director and the highly competent stage manager who handles everything. All three actresses want the part of Elizabeth Darcy because she is their favorite character ever! Only Jess can actually act, and she is given the part of Jane Bennet. Emily is a playwright/actress and very "modern". Her Elizabeth is all repressed angst and interpretative dance. It turns out however she is dating the director, so she is cast as Lizzie and the script is essentially turned over to her. Lauren can't act but highlights her ahem...physical allures and strangely enough is given the role of Lydia. Blake, the stoner, is given the role of Bingley, with a perhaps tongue in cheek allusion to the increasing inanity of Bingley in recent adaptations. David is gentlemanly, courteous and gorgeous and ends up being a perfect Darcy. The rest of the characters are scrapped as "unnecessary" by Emily.

Emily constantly rewrites the script, much to the rest of the cast's frustration, putting in things like Lydia and Wickham (played by a tailor dummy) eloping to Amsterdam complete with clog tap dancing scene. Lauren is a bit of a diva and continually tries to get the director to recast, using her ahem...physical charms. Jess is enraged at the bowdlerization of her favorite novel and refuses to say any lines that are not taken directly from the book. Blake disappears for days at a time or gets high to calm his anxiety about performing. Amidst all this Samantha (the stage director) and David find they are perfect for each other. He won't declare himself because he is dating Lauren and is too much the gentleman to leave her, and Sam is left wondering if her feelings are reciprocated at all. David's favor for Sam makes Lauren jealous despite the fact she is trying to seduce the director and she makes Sam's life miserable with petty revenges.

Everything comes to a head on opening night when Sam finally has enough and quits. The cast is thrown into an uproar because no-one knows how to run the lights or the sound effects etc. etc., but they muddle on anyway. The final production has Lydia and Wickham (now Red-Wickham the Pirate) elope to New York aboard a Pirate Ship. Once they reach New York Lizzie shows up and she and Lydia engage in a tap off to see whether Darcy will become a member of the Pirate crew, or if Lydia will return home with Lizzie. Meanwhile Bingley proposes to Jane after saving her from being mauled by a bear... yes I'm not quite sure how we got here either, but it sure was fun. David can't concentrate because Sam has left and nobody knows what they're doing. Luckily Sam shows up, prompts David, takes the role of Red Wickham and generally saves the show. The night is a success; Emily declares it perfect and she should have thought of a cross

dressing Pirate Wickham in the first place... and you'll have to watch the show to see how it all ends.

Certainly there is not a lot of Austen's original novel here, although in a weird way Lauren, David, Emily, Jess, Blake, Sam and Dominic (the director read Mr. Bennet) all correspond with the characters they are meant to portray. There are also several snide and self-aware references to the increasing prominence of Jane Austen in popular culture. Over all it is clever and laugh out loud funny. I loved it, and as long as you aren't expecting Regency England, Austentacious is one of the best Austen adaptations I've seen.....Arrr Matey!