

The Quill



Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival Newsletter • Summer 2023

Sounds and Sweet Airs That Give Delight Magic and Wonder in *The Tempest*

by Lisa K. Higgins

Although the title suggests a stormy experience, *The Tempest* delivers a treasure trove of joys—all twangling and tingling, shimmering like a rainbow. Cast upon an island shore in chaos, the audience joins a distinctive collection of characters: powerful and captive, innocent and monstrous, royal and disloyal. Healing and reunion emerge when the winds of wrath subside.

Shakespeare's Prospero commands the action and the island. Banished from his dukedom by his brother, Prospero has simmered in his anger for twelve years while raising his beloved daughter Miranda and ruling over the island's inhabitants. Magically aware that his enemies are sailing nearby, he seizes the opportunity to create a storm that forces them to crash-land on his domain.

"The spectacle is part of the play—it's built into the DNA of the production," says Jason King Jones, PSF artistic director. "Unlike most of the battles in other Shakespeare works, the storm happens right in front of you. The audience is experiencing the chaos—and the magic of live theatre.

"This production leans on the celebration that live theatre can be," he says. "The imagination of the theatremakers parallels the themes of an uninhabited island also being a theatre performance space. The world we're creating echoes a time when magic was real, incorporating a marriage of multiple periods and styles with its own logic."

Bending reality and enchantment, *The Tempest* contrasts human, subhuman "monsters," and superhuman themes and characters. Prospero rescues the spirit Ariel from imprisonment in a tree, then binds her

to his bidding—promising to free her after a year of service. Her preternatural power and creativity produce the tempest that captures the travelers.

Caliban, the lyrical monster who claimed the island as his domain before Prospero came to rule—perhaps holding a mirror that reflects how Prospero lost his own dukedom—is considered one of Shakespeare's most curious and ambiguous characters. Caliban is part fearsome, part poet, and sometimes, a drunken fool.

And then there is Miranda.

"She is beautiful, modest, and tender, and she is these only; they comprise her whole being, external and internal. She is so perfectly unsophisticated, so delicately refined, that she is all but ethereal.... This pure child of nature, this

'Eve of an enchanted Paradise...' placed her between the demi-demon of earth and the delicate spirit of air," according

This production leans on the celebration that live theatre can be.

to the authors in *The Works of William Shakespeare*.

"For twelve long years, Prospero has loved, taught, and protected Miranda. He recognizes that his purpose now is preparing to let her go," Jones says. Knowing Miranda's world is about to expand with the arrival of the seafarers, Prospero tries to tell her the whole story of how the two of them came to live on the island in the first place. How his once beloved brother conspired against him, forcing him to flee his land on a rickety boat with her a mere toddler. He refreshes his old wounds and plans his vengeance.

Past is Prologue

"*The Tempest* balances the conflict between power and leadership," says Jones.

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Jason King Jones Directs *The Tempest*

Occasionally, life delivers a tempest.

In the original plan, Dennis Razze, long-time PSF associate artistic director, would direct *The Tempest*.



Jason King Jones
Artistic Director

That plan was unfortunately interrupted, so Jason King Jones, PSF's new artistic director, assumed the reigns as director for *The Tempest*. While Razze and the creative team had already developed some key elements, there was space and time to explore and evolve.

"Stepping in and adopting a different point of view is an opportunity," Jones says. "As a director, you learn to deal with the parameters you've been given."

"Maybe I'm a great salsa dancer, but we're doing a waltz; both are dances, but the rules are different. As a creative person, that's a great invitation."

Early in the casting process, Razze asked Jones if Robert Cuccioli, an actor and friend Jones directed last season at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, would accept the role of Prospero. Cuccioli, a Tony-nominated actor with a collection of awards for his dual title roles in the Broadway musical *Jekyll & Hyde*, will make his PSF debut.

the Tempest

MAIN STAGE | JULY 12 to AUGUST 6

Tempest continued

"Prospero made the decision earlier in life to pour himself into magic to manipulate the world.

"He did a very human thing: he found something that gave him hope and refuge in a time of grief, but then it became the thing that corrupted him and drove him from society—we see him realizing that he has to release his identity as a sorcerer to embrace his responsibility as Duke.

"Another theme is that of slavery versus servitude. The individual creatures that Prospero controls, he controls against their will. They're not doing his bidding by choice—they're doing it by force," Jones says.

"Ariel relishes

having the power to create the effect of the tempest.

Everyone on the ship believes the ship is broken, but it is

in safe harbor. A magical spirit who can appear in different ways, Ariel only reveals herself to Prospero." Prospero repeatedly promises to free her—after just one more service. Once she has her freedom, however, she will lose her relationship with Prospero. Ariel is also the catalyst for Prospero's change of heart.

"How do we understand freedom ourselves?" Jones asks. "Prospero has made himself a slave to his own magic, which is both his salvation and his source of power. His magic is central to his survival on the island yet a barrier to him accepting his role in society.

"Expressions of love are linked to servitude—being of service is also an act of love. Then the idea of servitude is poisoned when choice is taken out of the equation. It completely corrupts the dynamic.

"Ultimately, Prospero comes to realize his own mortality, and he wants to be free to live and live more fully," Jones says. "Theatre itself is mortal. This production has limited performances. This experience will never happen again.

"At PSF, we talk about being of service to our community. Part of what happens in a play is the magic when we enter into an agreement between the storytellers on the stage and the audience.

"What we are doing is both a story that interrogates questions of power, leadership, and responsibility, and

examining how the expression of love is linked to service.

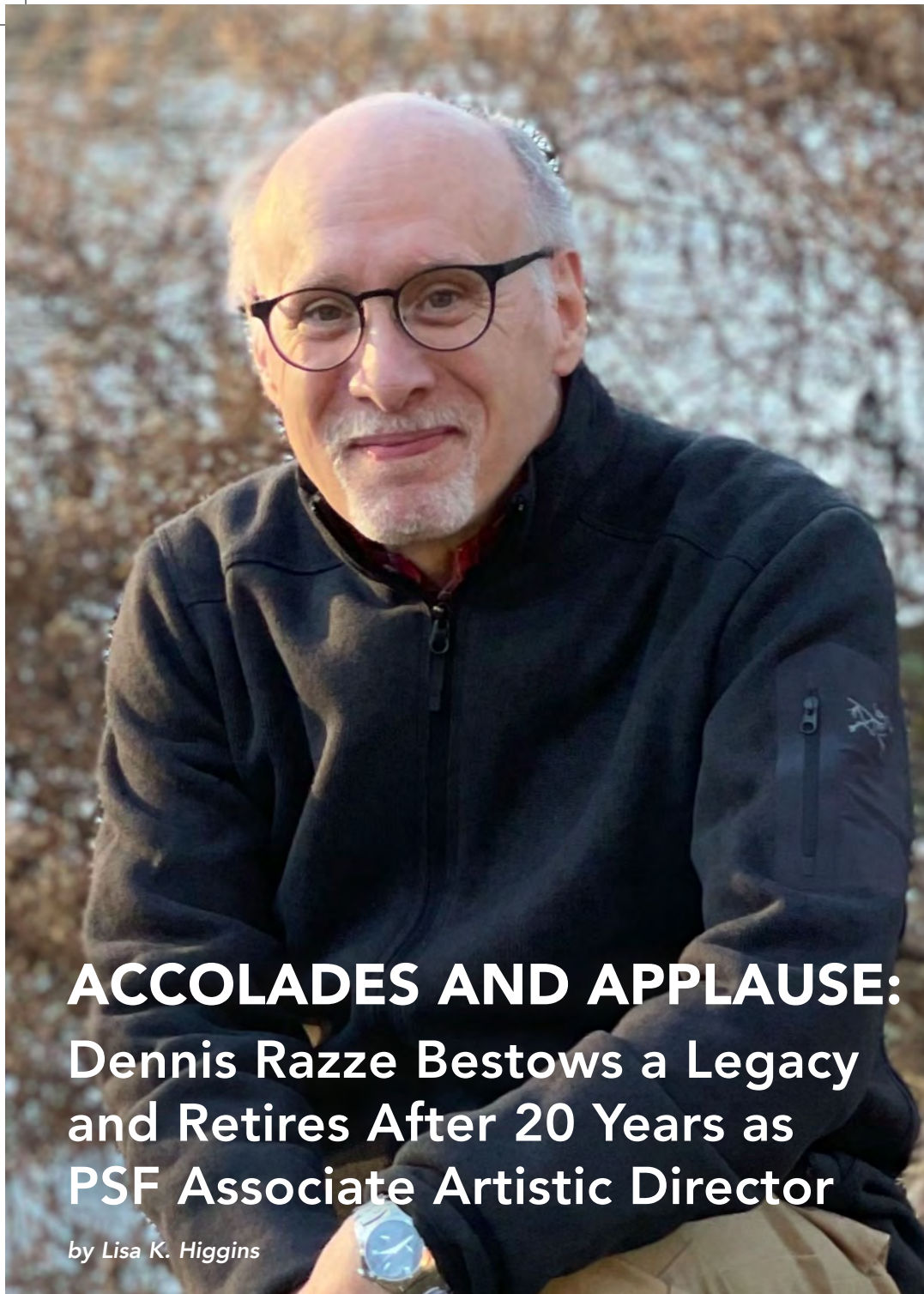
"The brilliant and convenient technologies that have allowed us to acquire information and entertainment at a moment's notice—just like magic—have also corrupted our ability to form authentic social connections. Live theatre is an antidote to this corruption. It engages us and helps bond us through shared artistic experiences.

"Hopefully, it helps us move into the world as a community and make better choices—and live in the infinite and beautiful present." ■

“Live theatre ... engages us and helps bond us through shared artistic experiences.”



ROBERT CUCCIOLI is best known for his critically acclaimed Tony nominated performance as the dual title roles in the Broadway hit musical *Jekyll & Hyde*, for which he also received the Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, and Chicago's Joseph Jefferson Awards for "Outstanding Actor in a Musical." His other Broadway credits include Inspector Javert in *Les Misérables* and Dr. Norman Osborn/The Green Goblin in *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark*. Off-Broadway he was seen in *And The World Goes 'Round* (Outer Critics Circle Award), *Rothschild and Sons* (Offie nomination – London), *Jacques Brel, Bikeman: A 9/11 Play*, *Snow Orchid*, *White Guy on the Bus*, *The White Devil*, *Caesar & Cleopatra*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and most recently *A Touch of the Poet* at The Irish Repertory Theatre. His television and film credits include *The Sinner*, *Elementary*, *White Collar*, *Sliders*, *Baywatch*, *The Guiding Light*, Woody Allen's *Celebrity*, *The Stranger*, *Impossible Monsters*, and *The Rest of Us*. Robert is currently involved with the new musical *Mozart: Her Story* now in development, and he recently performed the role of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.



ACCOLADES AND APPLAUSE: Dennis Razze Bestows a Legacy and Retires After 20 Years as PSF Associate Artistic Director

by Lisa K. Higgins

If accolades were stars, then Dennis Razze has earned a galaxy. Since the Festival's inception in 1992, he has gifted audiences and artists alike with his visions, collaborations, and talents as a director, composer, and actor.

Retiring this season as PSF's Associate Artistic Director, Razze directed some of the Festival's most stellar productions: from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1994, 2001), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1998), *Amadeus* (2007), and *Cyrano de Bergerac* (2008); to *Oklahoma!* (2013), the record-shattering *Les Misérables* (2015), and *West Side Story* (2016).

A founding member of the Festival, Razze worked alongside founder Gerard J. Schubert, OSFS, as a director, as a composer, and as an actor in Main Stage roles, including Hortensio in the Festival's first production in 1992, *The Taming of the Shrew*. For the past 20 years, Razze served as PSF's associate artistic director, in close collaboration with his friend and colleague, Patrick Mulcahy, former producing artistic director (2003-2022). In addition and concurrently, Razze chaired DeSales University's theatre department from

2003-2020 and served as ACT 1 Artistic Director for most of those years. Until his recent retirement, he also worked as a faculty member teaching full time and directing Act 1 productions.

"Dennis and I worked together closely for 26 years, beginning with sharing an office in Labuda as theatre faculty," Mulcahy says. "In those first seven years, Dennis helped to teach me the ropes and became a good friend.

"We were a great team, providing advice and counsel to each other on season selection, casting, production, curriculum, etc. Dennis had keen insights to offer in all areas, which I deeply appreciated. We learned from each other regularly as directors, educators, and as leaders."

"From the beginning, Patrick and I knew adding a musical would bring PSF to the next level—on par with Shakespeare festivals all over the country," Razze recalls. "We chose to produce *Man of La Mancha* as PSF's first musical (2004), because it is a show that says important things. Since I had directed all of Act 1's musicals, I would direct." Featuring Christopher Coucill as Don Quixote, DSU alum Mike Corr as Sancho Panza, and Alicia Irving as Aldonza/Dulcinea, *La Mancha* accomplished the possible dream, and set a new standard for PSF.

"His understanding of the American musical theatre canon was comprehensive, as it was for Shakespeare, the classics, and contemporary plays," says Mulcahy.

Razze's work as a director captivated audiences—as well as the actors who worked with him. The first Shakespeare play he directed for PSF, the 1994 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, remains one of his personal favorites, and still resonates for actors who became mainstays of the company.

Even with powerhouse actors in the leading roles: the mechanicals stole the show. "Steve Burns as Thisbe and Jim Helsinger as Bottom played off each other—and people were literally rolling in the aisle," Dennis says, laughing at the memory. "They broke up the rest of the cast. It's still one of the most incredible moments that I was a part of. It literally blew the house down."

PSF veteran Suzanne O'Donnell remembers: "I love the look, feel, and sound of a Dennis Razze Shakespeare production. His imagination is so vivid, and he brought beautiful and lush plays to the PSF stage. As a director, Dennis used his artistry in lighting and music to transport audiences across time and place. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* holds a special place in my heart for many reasons. As an actor, it was heaven to immerse in the world Dennis dreamed up!"

Greg Wood says: "I've known Dennis for over 30 years. Our first collaboration was *Midsummer*. We had such a great time! Watching Dennis, Jim Helsinger (as Bottom) and the rest of the mechanicals put together a scene is still my most favorite memory from that show."

"I learned so much from actors—Steve Burns, Greg Wood, Jim Helsinger," Razze said during an interview in February.

"It was like attending Shakespeare school." Although he did not consider himself an actor, Razze played one. "I wasn't an actor by practice," he says.

"I was thrust into the situation, like a pony with racehorses.

"Good actors are like athletes. They train. I was in the classroom, in rehearsal directing, or in a meeting with Schubert. I always felt behind."

Yet his work as a director took the lead and set records at the box office. *The Taming of the Shrew* (1998) set the benchmark—8,998—nearly double the attendance of any Shakespeare production up to that point. "We had a star-studded cast with Don Burroughs as Petruchio and Grace Gongelewski as Kate. And a Commedia dell'arte stage," Razze says.

Greg Wood remembers: "That's what makes working with Dennis such a thrill. He has an almost childlike joy in creating. It's infectious. You know it's going to be visually stunning to look at. And you also know, as an actor, you get to 'play' in that world. It's a wonderful collaboration.

"My favorite memory working with Dennis is our production of *Cyrano*. The play means a great deal to both of us. Dennis is a great musician who

understands the musicality of a scene. So, he was able to shape the passions and poetry into a beautiful reality."

Razze composed original music for *Cyrano*. "Being both director and composer is a wonderful privilege," he told a reporter at the time. "In 19th-century romantic plays, orchestras provided underscoring, just as today we have an orchestral score accompanying movies. Having muscular music and love themes to accompany the action was born in the theatre."

Razze's talents as a musician added dimension to his work with dance, and with Stephen Casey, who he first mentored as a student, and who has choreographed many of PSF's musicals, including *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and others. During *West Side Story*, Razze said: "I have worked with Stephen on so many shows now, it's like we are an extension of

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I love the look, feel, and sound of a Dennis Razze Shakespeare production. His imagination is so vivid, and he brought beautiful and lush plays to the PSF stage.
”

each other."

Their long collaboration continues to enrich Casey's own work as a director and choreographer. "I ask myself, 'Would Dennis like that?' Not just the singing, acting, and dancing. The whole vision," Casey says. "I am currently directing and choreographing *Camelot*—a show Dennis and I both love. Just like Merlin is the magician and teacher of King Arthur in *Camelot*, my Merlin is Dennis Razze."

Long-time PSF Costumer Designer Lisa Zinni, another former student of Razze's who first worked with him professionally on the 1994 *Midsummer*, and collaborated with him on numerous productions, praises the creative process with Razze and the design teams he assembles. With a collection of Broadway and Off-Broadway credits—*Rent*, *Hair*, *An American in Paris*, *SIX*, and *School of Rock*—Zinni notes, "Dennis and I had a mutual trust. We had a shared vision that always involved large creative concepts of how to make a show work, and somehow, we would make

it happen, even with limited time and budgetary constraints.

"We enjoyed throwing ideas out and thinking big. We shared an ability to zoom out and see the show as a whole, and to zoom in and focus on details. Which made for a like-minded understanding, and trust that what we were creating would be beautiful and something we could be proud of and excited to share on the stage at PSF."

In *Les Miz*, Razze created a sensation. A pinnacle of achievement among the heights of his achievements. "With only three and a half weeks of rehearsal," he says, still a bit astonished. "At intermission on opening night, Father Schubert told me, 'The Festival has finally arrived.'"

Even before the first preview, *Les Miz* set records: the most expensive production up until then, the largest cast—37 members—and 200 costume changes. The most Broadway and

recording stars... and the most Equity actors—13.

"The ever-fearless director Dennis Razze has managed to cobble together a staging with more than

a score of performers (actors double and triple in 40 roles) and a 14-piece orchestra," George Hatza wrote in *The Reading Eagle*. "He inspired his designers to churn out stunning costumes (Lisa Zinni), evocative lighting (Eric T. Haugen) and a striking set (Steve TenEyck), complete with a rotating barricade. And he found commanding actors who, undaunted by the show's demanding score, also are gorgeous singers."

"Razze's direction...displays a musical theatre master at the top of his form. It's a masterpiece," wrote Paul Willistein in *East Penn Press*.

"Ambitious." "Stupendous." "Flawless."

A Festival arriving home. A home built with vision and care by many artists, and the singular light of Dennis Razze. ■

Lisa K. Higgins served as a founding staff member at PSF and its first director of marketing and public relations. She is currently writing a memoir: *Genes on Fire: Adoption, Adaptation, DNA and Me*

Shakespeare's Magical Players Mingle with Regency Era Austen Characters: Meet the Cast and the Return to "Rep"

The Tempest and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* feature actors in our repertory cast who will be alternating two plays and two roles on the Main Stage. Actors love the richness of the challenge—alternating the roles during the run—and audiences love to see them do it! The cast includes familiar faces, recent newcomers, and first-timers, too. We hope you will enjoy seeing them all and it makes for an unforgettable experience that will keep you coming back year-after-year.



JOHN AUSTIN
Ferdinand/Willoughby



ARRIANNA DANIELS
Marianne Dashwood



AKEEM DAVIS
Trinculo/Edward Ferrars



SARAH GLIKO
Ariel/Elinor Dashwood



JIM HELSINGER
Stephano



ERIC HISSOM
Alonso



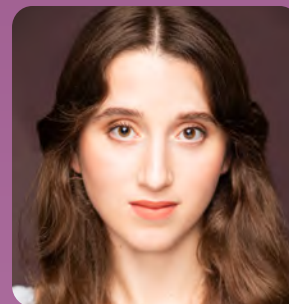
GREGORY ISSAC
Antonio/Col. Brandon



IYANU JOSHUASVILLE
Adrian/Robert Ferrars



GINA LAMPARELLA
Juno/Mrs. Dashwood



NICOLE LAWRIE
Fransisca/Margaret Dashwood



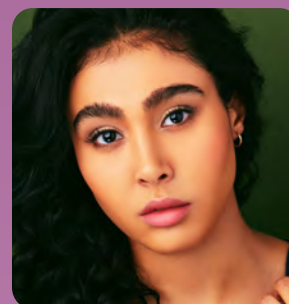
CHRISTOPHER PATRICK MULLEN
Caliban/ Thomas Middleton



DAVID PICA
Sebastian/John Dashwood



SUE JIN SONG
Gonzala/Mrs. Jennings



BILLIE WYATT
Miranda/Fanny Dashwood

ADAPTING AUSTEN: Jessica Swale's Masterful *Sense and Sensibility* takes the PSF Stage

by Jessica Bedford

Many moons ago, in a college class on the literature of the Western Canon, my professor said that we wouldn't be reading any "marriage plot" material for the course. Seemingly to address an unspoken question, he continued, "So that's Jane Austen. Things like that." And then, I'm certain, he gave a dismissive chuckle before battering on about the glories of his selected reading list. It's possible that he may have also twisted his mustache as he chuckled but there I fear that my emotional experience of this moment may be coloring what actually happened.

If we're looking to popular culture (read: TV and Hollywood films), I can somewhat see his point: Colin Firth emerging from a pond, Emma Thompson just making it into the next room as she finally cries, and any number of beautiful starlets stuck in a field or garden emoting through rain and thunderclaps.

Don't leave me, dear reader, I love those films and performances as much as you do. (Who knew a scummy pond could be so...sexy?) But it must be said that those pieces are adaptations of Austen's work, not Austen's work. So while this comment from my professor hit me as misogynistic, it also made me wonder if this man, a professor of Western literature, had ever sat down and read an Austen novel—a writer so important in her home country

that her face graces their money. The ten-pound note to be exact. She's the UK's Alexander Hamilton.

It cannot be denied that romance is a part of all of Austen's stories, but I would counter that she wasn't writing about marriage, she was writing about women.

Writer Helena Kelly in her book *Jane Austen: the Secret Radical*, puts it succinctly, "Marriage mattered because it was the defining action of a woman's life; to accept or refuse a proposal was almost the only decision that a woman could make for herself."

In Regency England, when a woman married, everything became

“
For a woman, marriage wasn't romance—it was a high-stakes bet. And her ability to thrive and survive hinged on that bet.
”

the legal property of her husband. As Kelly puts it, "her money, her body, her very existence as a legal adult." For a woman, marriage wasn't romance—it was a high-stakes bet. And her ability to thrive and survive hinged on that bet.

Unmarried women had three options: destitution, dependence on male relatives, or a convent; a fact that Austen herself knew all too well as an unmarried woman who relied on the financial kindness of her brothers her entire adult life despite earning some income as a published writer.

If we're talking genre, Austen's stories aren't Romance, they are Naturalism, right up there with the works of Ibsen—for me—in that they examine the consequences of society's systems, rules, and laws on

the individual. But, Jane, bless her, had the audacity to be optimistic about her characters' fates in the face of their hardships and perhaps that's because she bolstered them with more than just a rugged sense of individualism.

If romantic love is one strand of the DNA of Austen's works, its intertwining twin is family, both biological and chosen. While Ibsen's Nora stands alone against society in *A Doll's House*, famously declaring, "I must decide who is right—society or I," in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen's Elinor Dashwood has two sisters, a devoted mother, an avuncular and generous family

friend, a jolly if gossipy neighbor, a loyal servant...I could go on but I think you take the point.

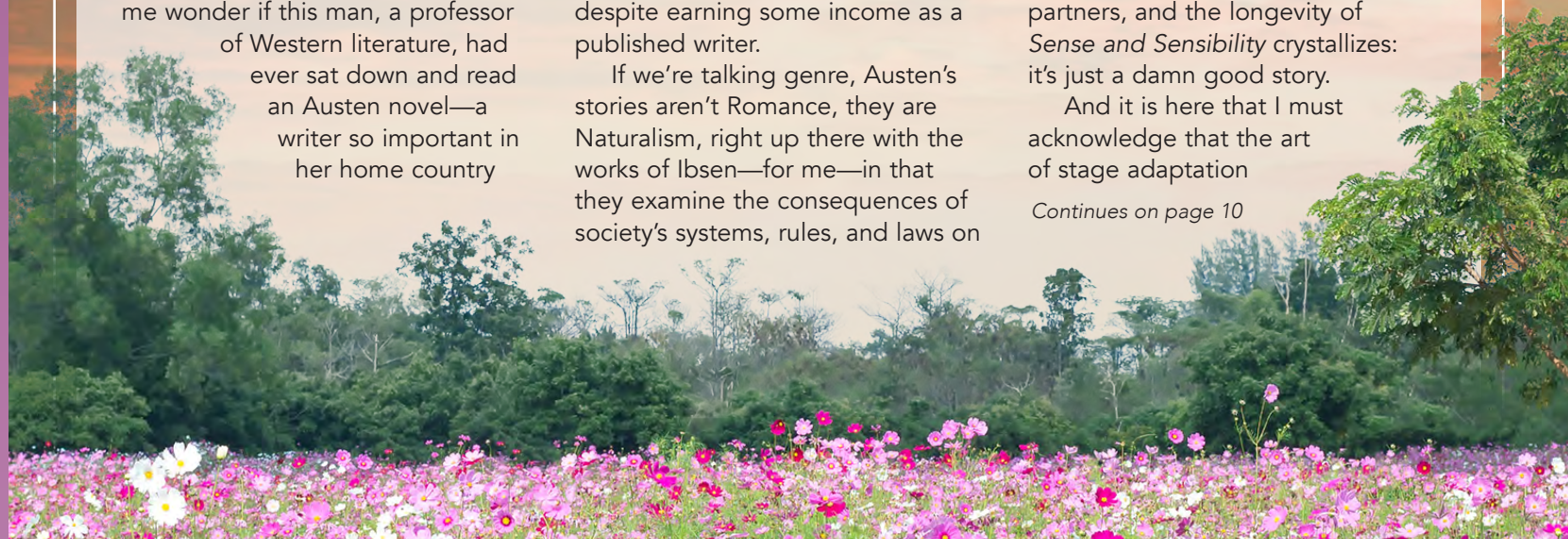
So when a vicious and patriarchal land entail comes smashing down on

the Dashwoods' heads, depriving them of their home just as they are plunged into vibrant grief, we wonder not if they will be okay, but how.

Add to this finely crafted and deeply human characters, a few villains (both intentional and unintentional), a few clowns (both intentional and unintentional), a military hero, a handsome cad (who sword fights!), and two heroines on a collision course with not just husbands, but well-matched partners, and the longevity of *Sense and Sensibility* crystallizes: it's just a damn good story.

And it is here that I must acknowledge that the art of stage adaptation

Continues on page 10



TWO ARTISTS REUNITE IN *Lady Day* AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL

by George Hatza

Philadelphia natives Amina Robinson and Ebony Pullum keep crossing paths, and those recurrent strokes of good fortune have served them well. The two thespians most recently connected to stage playwright Lanie Robertson's niche musical *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* as part of Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival's 32nd season.

PSF's 2023 rendition is subtitled "Brave New Worlds." So when the Festival's artistic director Jason King Jones was asked how this poignant work—set during the final days of iconic jazz singer Billie Holiday's life—fit into that context, he replied: "I wanted a big, diverse season with multiple opportunities to welcome new attendees to the Festival."

After a perusal of this summer's lineup, one would have to admit that Jones and his staff have succeeded in creating a season that boldly embraces the widest possible community outreach.

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill, Jones pointed out, is the first musical in the Festival's history to be performed in the cozy Schubert Theatre rather than on the more

presentational Main Stage. That's an artful decision, given that the play unfolds in a snug South Philadelphia jazz club in the 1950s.

This fortuitous choice has opened the door for the show's director, Amina Robinson, to create a uniquely intimate environment, one in which the audience



Amina Robinson
Director



Ebony Pullum
Billie Holiday



can experience an evening with Billie Holiday in something approaching real time. As such, *Lady Day* feels more like a play with music than what one normally would consider an outright Broadway musical.

Robinson became the first Black female director of a musical to win a Barrymore Award, honoring professional theater in and surrounding Philadelphia, for her acclaimed 2018 mounting of *The Color Purple* at Norristown's Theatre Horizon. She was suggested to Jones by Festival veterans as a solid choice to direct the show. In turn, when Robinson accepted the offer, she recommended Ebony Pullum to play Billie Holiday.

Robinson and Pullum first met when the latter was 14 years old and a theater student at North Philadelphia's historic Freedom Theatre, an institution celebrated for its exploration of African-American themes. Both artists performed there in *Sparkle: The Musical*.

Robinson—now a director, actor, and an assistant professor of acting and musical theater at Temple University—earned a B.A. in theater with a focus on acting and an M.F.A. in acting, both degrees from Temple. Among the accolades for her production of *The Color Purple* was a Barrymore Award for Pullum's supporting performance as Shug Avery in the musical.

Robinson also coached Pullum for her role as Billie Holiday in a Florida production of *Lady Day*, the second time the actress played the part. Jones was thrilled with Robinson's choice of Pullum, as he explained: "She will bring with her the great skill that comes with having played the character in addition to her grasp of the material."

For Pullum, the chance to play Billie for a third time offers the opportunity for new discoveries, allowing her and Robinson to dig more deeply into character and nuance. As she called it, "playing" with the part.

"I can't wait to hear Amina's vision for approaching this," Pullum said, her voice shimmering with excitement. "That sense of finding new things I hadn't thought of before. It's difficult to uncover actual video footage of Billie. So, in the past I listened to not only her songs but radio interviews to try to capture her speaking voice, her unusual vocal cadence. I love accents. I can mimic anyone.

"However, my goal is to find the mannerisms and specificity of what made her, her."

For Robinson, Pullum's ability to conjure the sound and physicality of Billie is just one part of the process.

"I love that Ebony can transform herself like that,"

Robinson said. "But I'm more focused on the essence of Billie Holiday and the energy that Billie brought to the stage. The fact that Ebony has the speaking patterns and singing voice under her belt is terrific, but I want to focus on the feeling of watching this person on the stage.

"Yes, I'm going for the realism at the heart of *Lady Day*, the café-table route for the kind of immersive experience the play suggests. But I want it to succeed spiritually as well, to

allow the audience to feel as if, 'Wow! That felt like I was in the room with Billie Holiday.' That's the mood I'm after."

Robinson peppers her comments with bursts of laughter. She exudes joy, but she no doubt comprehends the bleakness that lingers in the whiskey-scented atmosphere of *Lady Day*. Her Barrymore Award for unraveling the intricate sexual and racial themes of *The Color Purple* is proof of that.

Lady Day is set in March 1959, just four months before Holiday's tragic death at age 44 from heart failure due to cirrhosis of the liver. That fact hangs over the play as if it were a shroud, prophesying the singer's inexorable fate.

However, Robinson added, she hopes to be able to "add moments of magic as we move forward." What else could one expect from an artist who sang and danced in *Mamma Mia!* and *Godspell* on Broadway? Indeed, Robinson's resume is impressive, including the role of Jermaine in the award-winning 2009 film *Precious* and a recurring role in the Showtime dramedy *Nurse Jackie* (2009-2015).

She just completed her direction of the hit musical *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* for Philadelphia's Arden Theatre Company this spring. In the fall, she will mount the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fat Ham*—a quasi-comedic spin on the Bard's *Hamlet*—at that city's Wilma Theater.

Among her many regional-theater mountings is (her favorite playwright) Lynn Nottage's *Fabulation and the Re-Education of Undine* at the Lantern Theater Company in Philadelphia, in which Pullum performed. And now the two are reunited once again for *Lady Day*, set in South Philly where both Robinson and Pullum reside.

Clearly, serendipity is at play.

Pullum fell in love with acting while watching *The Cosby Show* as a child. "I remember saying, 'Mom, I can do that!' when watching little Rudy on that show," Pullum recalled.

As for Robinson, well, it took her some time to figure out exactly where she was headed.

"My interests were always shifting," she said. "I didn't want to be a writer because of all the typing. And when I realized that being a dancer wasn't like it was in *Fame*, I learned I didn't have the discipline. I played with the notion of being a newscaster, but I found it tedious. So, I just walked across the hall (at Temple University) to the theater department.

"I thought, 'This will be the easiest thing in the world.' And the rest is history." ■

George Hatza is a director, a freelance arts writer, and the former Entertainment Editor of the Reading Eagle. He lives in Berks County, Pennsylvania.

Lady Day AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL

SCHUBERT THEATRE | JULY 19 to AUGUST 6

Sense continued

is a difficult one. I can tell you from experience that a novel one might deem “beach read” in length can easily make for a four and a half hour play if cuts aren’t made. Who could fault those previous adaptors if they cut right to the romance? If they go right to what is scintillating and sexy, even if it deprives the story of some richness?

Well, adaptor Jessica Swale can, that’s who. It’s her adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* you’ll see onstage this summer and what she achieves in her pages is masterful. True to her source material, Swale embraces the search for soul-mates of Elinor and her sister Marianne with big open arms, but she retains romantic love as a part of life, an important part but just a part; as a

way to grow and generate familial love and community. It isn’t a marriage plot, it’s a love story and I can’t wait to bring it to life for you. ■

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

MAIN STAGE | JULY 20 to AUGUST 5



JESSICA BEDFORD, *Director*

Jessica Bedford is a Philadelphia based actor, director, dramaturg, playwright and teacher. She has been seen onstage at McCarter Theatre, Walnut Street, Lantern Theatre, Montgomery Theatre, Act II Playhouse, Theatre Horizon, People's Light, and other stages in the Philadelphia area. Recent directing credits include Delaware Shakespeare, Philadelphia Artists' Collective, Act II Playhouse, DeSales University, McCarter and PSF. She has taught at Villanova University, Temple University, and University of the Arts. She is co-author of the satirical piece *The Complete Works of Jane Austen, Abridged*. Currently, she is an assistant professor of theatre at DeSales University. Villanova University, MA; Queens University, MFA.

Meet Jane Austen

by Andrea Selitto, *Dramaturg*

Austen may have begun writing her first draft of *Sense and Sensibility* as early as 1795. Originally entitled “Elinor and Marianne,” it began as an epistolary novel, the story unfolding through letters written by its characters. According to Austen’s sister Cassandra, the family gathered around as Austen read aloud from the manuscript for their entertainment. Unfortunately, little else is known about the composition of this early draft. By the fall of 1796 Austen had already embarked on her next literary venture, a story which she called “First Impressions” but which her readers eventually come to know as *Pride and Prejudice*.

It was during this period of creativity that Austen had her most famous flirtation, with the nephew of a neighboring family. Tom Lefroy was an Irish law student who came on a visit to his aunt and uncle in December of 1795. The pair danced together at several balls that season, and Lefroy even called on Austen at Steventon Rectory. Austen suspected a proposal might be imminent—but it never came. The Lefroys sent their nephew home, and he was soon engaged to a lady with a large fortune.

Nevertheless, Austen continued to write. She completed “First Impressions” in the summer of 1797 and her next manuscript followed in 1799. For the time being, however, her stories remained unpublished.

Little could Austen have known, but her life was about to take a sudden turn. In December of 1800, George Austen retired at age 70. Austen’s eldest brother James, a clergyman himself, succeeded his father as the rector. He moved back into Steventon Rectory with his wife and children, displacing his parents and two sisters. The ousted family members relocated to Bath, where George died in early 1805. Without him, the Austen women struggled on an annual income of £460—too little for fashionable and expensive Bath. They rented a series of ever-cheaper lodgings, eventually abandoning Bath for the down-market city of Southampton.

Amidst the uncertainty, Austen’s writing fell to the wayside.

This period of upheaval in Austen’s life lasted until 1809, when another one of her brothers, Edward Austen Knight, offered his sisters and mother a place to live in a cottage near his own home in the village of Chawton. Finally secure again, Austen turned her attention back to her writing. She began by revising the manuscripts she had written over a decade earlier as a young woman at Steventon Rectory.

Only a year after the Austen women had settled at Chawton Cottage, *Sense and Sensibility* became the first of these revised manuscripts to be sold to a publisher, earning Austen £140. The first edition of the novel, released in three volumes, was brought to print in 1811. At age 35, Jane Austen was finally a published author.

Austen’s debut novel proved a success, and she soon sold her next manuscript, *Pride and Prejudice*, which was published in 1813. She went on to complete two more novels: *Mansfield Park*, published in 1814, and *Emma*, published in 1815.

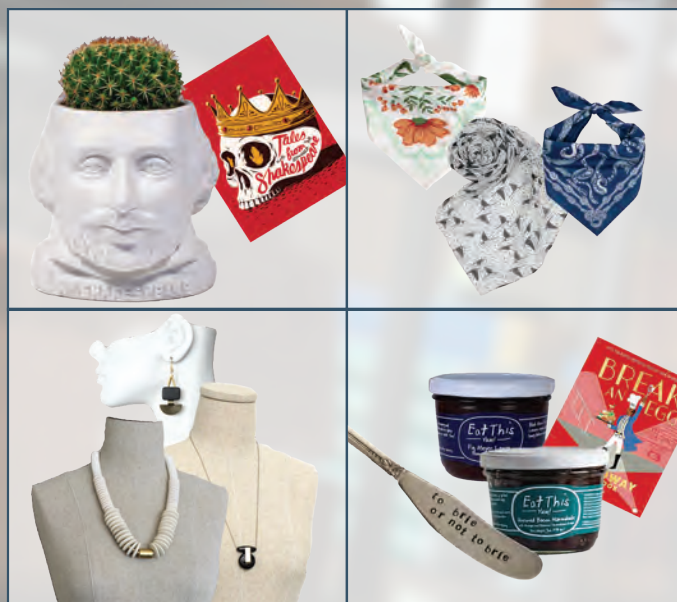
Austen’s prolific career, however, was soon cut short. Her health began to decline in early 1816, and though she continued to write for as long as she could, her condition only worsened as the year went on.

In May of 1817, Austen, along with her sister Cassandra, traveled to Winchester in search of a remedy for her ailing health. She died there on July 18, 1817, at only 41 years old. Her final two novels—*Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*—were published posthumously later that year. ■





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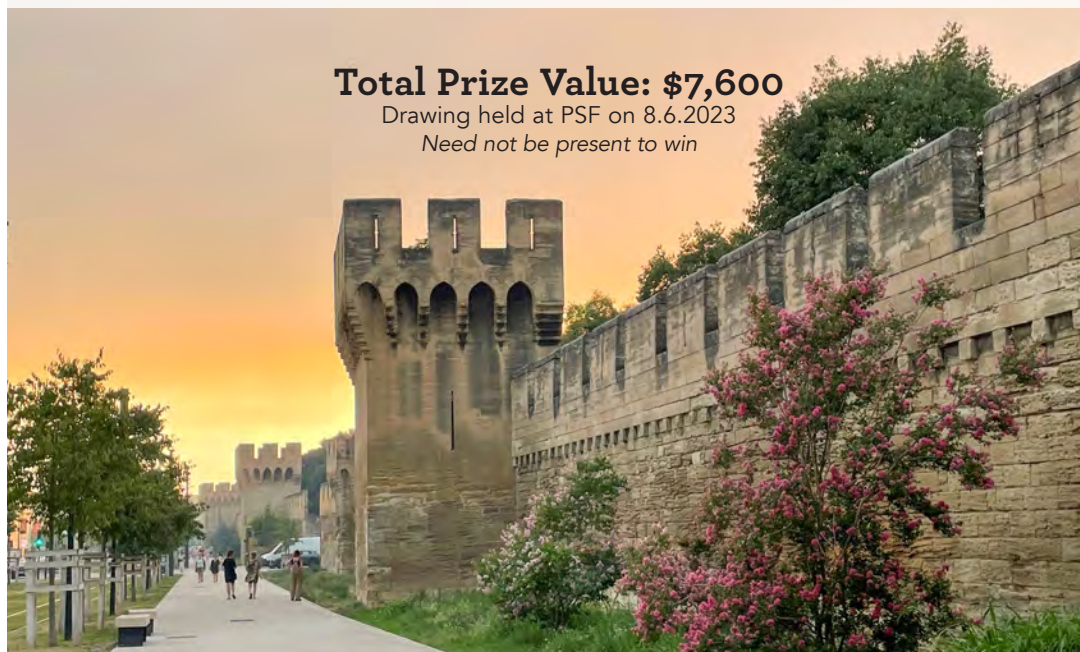
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