

THE STYLE ISSUE

# SOUTHPARK

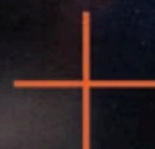
THE ART & SOUL OF CHARLOTTE

September 2025



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**IT**List

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# PRIDE & JOY

*Celebrating 250 years of Jane: Austen's Pride comes to Charlotte in a rare pre-Broadway production.*

by **Gayvin Powers**

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a reader in possession of a Jane Austen novel must be in want of a new adaptation."*

Ever since Colin Firth emerged from the lake at Pemberley in the BBC's 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries, viewers worldwide have been hungry for more. Fortunately for Janeites (devoted Austen followers), *Austen's Pride*, a pre-Broadway musical, comes to Charlotte's Knight Theater Sept. 2-7. It's more than a musical: The show adapts the most beloved of Austen's works, *Pride and Prejudice*, while inserting the author herself into the storyline.

Before women were acknowledged as writers, Austen was in search of an authentic life. Lindsay Warren Baker and Amanda Jacobs, playwrights of *Austen's Pride*, infused Austen's personal journey with her enduring tale, creating a captivating Regency story full of joy. The character of Jane Austen questions true happiness, exploring her past, her future and her influence on Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship.

"It's a classic story that resonates in a contemporary way," says Tom Gabbard, president and CEO of Blumenthal Arts. "We don't often have an opportunity to bring pre-Broadway productions, so when this opportunity presented itself, it was an easy yes," Gabbard adds, noting that Knight Theater offers an intimate experience similar to Broadway.

## ALL THINGS AUSTEN

*Austen's Pride* joins the public's growing swell for all things Austen. Since her publications 200 years ago, the writer has become a global icon for women authors. 2025 commemorates the anniversary of her 250th birthday, and Janeites have been celebrating all year at events from England to Australia.



*Austen's Pride* leans into the original *Pride and Prejudice* story, satisfying heartfelt moments found in the book and adaptations. Baker and Jacobs wove Austen's writing in the musical, transcending the time period and making the story "more than a historical piece," says R.

Erin Craig, the show's producer. Like Austen's work, "It embraces the human experience," Craig says. "It's about choices, second chances and love."

Baker and Jacobs toured Austen's home and the *Pride and Prejudice* book locations to capture the author's experience in their original score. In 2023, their musical was performed with a 25-piece orchestra at Carnegie Hall.

"The first time I heard 'When I Fall In Love,' it brought me to tears of joy," Craig recalls.

When Olivia Hernandez auditioned for the role of Jane, she built on her previous experience with *Austen's Pride*.

"We just knew that she was our Jane," Craig says. "Having played Elizabeth in previous versions of the show, she brought a greater depth and understanding to the role," Craig notes, while also applauding the strong creative team, crew and cast, which includes Dan Hoy as Mr. Darcy and Delphi Borich as Elizabeth Bennet.

## STAYING POWER

Adaptations like *Austen's Pride* have kept the author's spirit alive. Austen could've been a footnote in history, like so many other women authors. It seemed that was her fate, as her publications had been out of print for 12 years after her death.

Caroline Jane Knight, Austen's fifth great niece, grew up at Chawton House, where Jane lived the last years of her life.

"We left Chawton House in 1988; we didn't know what would



## AUSTEN AROUND TOWN

Create a “Jane Austen” day around Charlotte: Go on a themed history tour, enjoy afternoon tea, see *Austen’s Pride* and peruse romance novels at a local bookstore.

### SPILL THE TEA BUS TOUR

Dress up and take a two-hour *Bridgerton*-themed history tour aboard a retrofitted school bus. Tickets are \$69 and include tea service. [whimsywheelswandertours.com](http://whimsywheelswandertours.com)

### CHEZ MARIE PÂTISSERIE

Tea is served daily from 2-4 p.m. at this Sharon Corners cafe. The cost is \$30 per person, plus 18% service charge. To reserve, call 704-910-3013.

### A CAUSE FOR TEA

Enjoy tea and shop for handmade gifts made by women in Nicaragua in a historic home in downtown Monroe. Tea is served Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The last seating is at 4 p.m.; first-come, first-served. Learn more at [acausefortea.org](http://acausefortea.org).

### THE BALLANTYNE

Afternoon tea is served from 1-4 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. The cost is \$49 for adults and \$29 for children 12 and under. Reserve via Open Table; more information at [theballantynehotel.com](http://theballantynehotel.com).

### TROPE BOOKSHOP

This romance-only bookshop in Plaza Midwood has a historical/Royal section that includes adaptations. [tropebookshop.com](http://tropebookshop.com)



happen,” Knight says. “Jane Austen wasn’t the global megastar she is today. Chawton House was unknown — it was our private family home, and it was before the internet and social media — and I thought my life with Jane Austen and Chawton was over.”

The success of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries and the recent *Bridgerton* Netflix series declared otherwise. Austen’s bylines on her own works may have been “Anonymous” and “By a Lady,” but her popularity has dramatically increased since those recent adaptations. Who could forget Colin Firth bathed in golden light, damp from a swim at Pemberley? The world collectively swooned. A new standard for romance was set, and the name was “Darcy.”

Aside from the fascination with Fitzwilliam Darcy, Knight notes three elements to Austen’s staying power: her timeless writing, being true to herself and her mystery. Known for her portrayal of real people, Austen could sum up characters in a few words, making her writing accessible and timeless.

“Everyone knows one of Jane’s characters in real life,” Knight says. “She was a keen observer and had incredible emotional intelligence.” Everyone knows a Mr. Darcy, Mr. Wickham and even Mr. Collins.

### A COURAGEOUS REFUSAL

Modern readers also resonate with Austen’s strong sense of self. She wrote during a time that was challenging for women to say their truth, let alone write it. A favorite Austen story is about the Rev. James Stanier Clarke, England’s Prince Regent’s Librarian. Clarke shared with Austen that the prince was an admirer of her books. The prince kept a complete set of her work at all of his residences. By royal decree she was to dedicate *Emma*, her fourth publication, to the prince. She begrudgingly agreed, but that wasn’t the end of it.

On behalf of the prince, Clarke requested that she write a “Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg.” The prince’s support could’ve solved her family’s financial issues. But to agree, Austen would have gone against her truth.

Her response to Clarke was courageous, and masterful. She thanked him for the suggestion, adding, “I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life ... No — I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way.” Men with more influence than Austen hadn’t untangled themselves from a royal decree as adeptly as she did.

### A WOMAN OF MYSTERY

History remembers her as a romantic, but like Elizabeth Bennet, she was a realist. She never considered herself a romance writer; she was an author, who collected impressions of the human condition.

“She’s a savvy woman with mystery surrounding her,” says Knight. Over the years, a lack of details surrounding Austen’s personal life have added to the intrigue. Furthermore, only





blvd. | theater

*Caroline Jane Knight, Austen's fifth great niece, with a new sculpture of Jane Austen by Mark Coreth unveiled on June 21 in the town of Alton.*

women with money or power had their portraits painted in Austen's time. She would've been excluded from such a luxury since she'd been in poverty for almost a decade before moving to Chawton House.

"We have a sketch by her sister, Cassandra, but it wasn't a good likeness," Knight says.

With few details about her life apparent, Austen is similar to Darcy.

"Her portrayal of Mr. Darcy, I believe, was deliberately brief," Knight says. "That allows everyone to have their own Mr. Darcy. In an extraordinary way, the same thing has happened to her."

#### STILL AN INSPIRATION

Jane Austen was quietly outrageous for her time. Determined to be a published author, she carved out a life as a writer when a woman's profession was in the home. She's timeless, a muse who influenced over 100 modern adaptations. She speaks to generations of women, who've turned to her like a beacon. And as *Austen's Pride* shows, she's still inspiring others, even after 250 years. **SP**



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