

Ballet Fantastique's Pride & Prejudice, October. 16

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Ballet Fantastique delivered a warm and lovely confection in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, a Parisian Jazz Ballet.

Set in jazzy 1920's Paris, the performance swept through Austen's enduring story with a breezy, yet thoughtful, pace. The Regency Era is a tough time to be single, and as the five "Bennette" sisters express varying degrees of ardor and rancor, at their potential suitors, BFan really comes alive.

Hats off to the Gerry Rempel Jazz Syndicate, whose live music was an integral part of the production. Vocalists Amy LeSage and Susanna Meyer were especially transporting, evoking the unmistakable ennui, affection and joy that decades of Jazz produced. Their voices were like a time machine. Just delightful.

BFan's choreography is first-rate throughout, enjoyable, moody, lively and fun. Their work is accessible and approachable, and they utilize what they have to great effect. Ashley Bontrager as Lizzy sails, but all the sisters bring impish, devoted energy to their work.

Natanael Leal is stunning as outsider George Wickham. Gustavo Ramirez retains a suitably haughty air as Darcy, and Justin Feimster has fun as Bingley.

As character tropes, the five sisters and their paramours are progenitors of so many works that followed them, and they're each quite distinct, in the way Austen writes them. To the degree that they can within the confines of ballet, BFan explores the subtleties between and among their stylistic approaches, though group numbers rely on unison.

The dance looks polished and complete, and dances are uniformly confident and danced with great enthusiasm and rich, decorative detailing in the arms and footwork. BFan's aesthetic doesn't push across the space aggressively, it doesn't shout or shock, but relies on consistently interesting relational connections, intricate pathways and nuanced characterization.

Adam Goldthwaite narrates as Vicar Collins, and even gets into the action. Goldthwaite is clearly having a ball in his role, and carries the narrative forward for those who are unfamiliar. Still, there is room in Goldthwaite's delivery for more modulation, a softening, especially when he's speaking not his own character's lines, but Austen's precious narrative prose. This Austen-ite (named my firstborn daughter Jane!) could have used a tad more sincerity from Goldthwaite as the piece drew to a close.

Costumes designed by Donna Marisa Bontrager and constructed by Allison Ditson fit the bill, as bright and full of hope as a box of macarons from the finest Parisian pastry shop.

Genevieve Speer and Deborah Speer have helped to shape the libretto, no small task, surely.

The set and backdrop were a darling diversion from the bleak rain outside, a ribald expression of dopey, adoring love. And why not?

BFan has a good thing going. They received a standing ovation, richly deserved. They're making an austere art form accessible to new audiences. I saw people of all ages in the audience, having a great time with movement and theater that they could relate to.

A BFan supporter spoke before the show about their work to bring children from the Jasper Mountain treatment center to see BFan productions. Hats off to these types of efforts. We should all find ways to make dance a part of everyone's lives.

[About the Author »](#)

Rachael Carnes

Rachael Carnes has written for *Eugene Weekly* as well as *The Stranger* in Seattle, since the mid-nineties. Covering dance, theater, performance art as well as human interest stories, Rachael enjoys meeting new people and seeing their creative process in action. As the founder of a local non profit, Sparkplug Dance, she spent 15 years teaching movement to kids in our community who juggle any number of risk factors, and now dedicates most of her time to supporting Arts Integration in area Middle Schools, through her work with the Educational Policy Improvement Center.

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