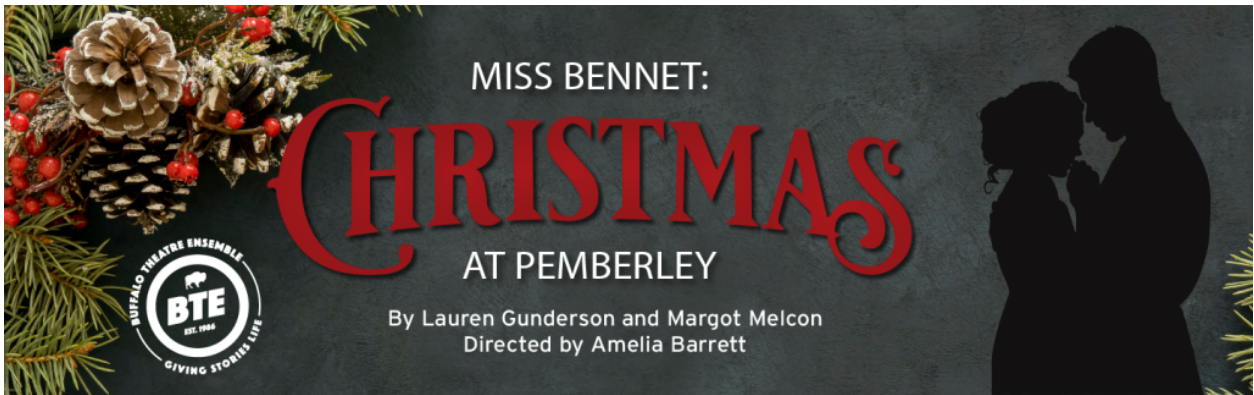


Buffalo Theatre Ensemble
Presents



by Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon

Directed by Amelia Barrett

McAninch Arts Center
Playhouse Theatre
November 17 -December 17, 2023

presented by arrangement with Dramatists Play Services, Inc.

Preview: Thursday, November 16, 20

It's two years after the end of the novel. The Bennet family is spending Christmas at Pemberley. Mary Bennet is the bookish, unmarried middle sister. An unexpected guest joins the festivities. This romantic comedy, rooted in the complications and joys of being part of a spirited family, will delight Austen enthusiasts and newcomers alike.

Time: 1815

Place: A large drawing room and attached library of Pemberley, the grand estate of Mr. and Mrs. Darcy. In the past quite formal, but Lizzy has warmed it up with a sense of home.

There will be a 15 minute intermission for this production

Characters:

MARY BENNET—20. Finally coming in to her own, she is no longer the plain, boring girl she once was. She has a fire in her now. She is intelligent, curious, and lively, but her family only sees her as a future spinster. She does not suffer fools. She wants to live.

ARTHUR de BOURGH—25. A studious, unsociable only child who has never been around women or large families. He is a loner who prefers books to people. He has recently inherited a large estate and has no idea what to do next.

ELIZABETH DARCY—22, married to Mr. Darcy. Confident, charming, and witty. She makes a fun and surprising lady of the house. She is best friends with her sister Jane.

FITZWILLIAM DARCY—30. A loving, generous, and smart (if slightly stiff) husband. He is quiet and vigilant and thus sees what others often miss. He knows what being lovelorn is like.

JANE BINGLEY—24, married to Mr. Bingley. She is seven months pregnant with her first child and is sweet and optimistic as ever. The kindest heart in the house.

CHARLES BINGLEY—25. Gracious, happy, and ever focused on the love of his life, Jane. A good friend and always ready with a smile.

LYDIA WICKHAM—17. Flirtatious, youthful, self-centered. Her marriage to Mr. Wickham is a sham but she will not admit this. She is the person you want to have at your party: energetic, engaging, unstoppable.

ANNE de BOURGH—20s. Only daughter of the late Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Lived in her mother's very large shadow, never having to ask for anything or speak for herself her entire life. Judgmental and impatient, just like her mother.¹

Director's Note

A persistent question for readers at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* is exactly what happens to the Bennet family once the last lines are written. Jane Austen informs us a bit about Lydia and Wickham, about the happiness between Elizabeth and Darcy, and even Lady Catherine. But, Miss Mary Bennet? This is what Austen tells us:

Mary was the only daughter who remained at home; and she was necessarily drawn from the pursuit of accomplishments by Mrs. Bennet's being quite unable to sit alone. Mary was obliged

¹ Gunderson, Lauren and Melcon, Margot. *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc. 2017.

to mix more with the world, but she could still moralize over every morning visit; and as she was no longer mortified by comparisons between her sisters' beauty and her own, it was suspected by her father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance.

It is here that our playwrights begin their imaginings. And, it is here that our enjoyment of “a life well lived” begins. Each of the sisters has their own folly, related to that of the others' and for that matter to ours, but each self-concern gives way to the rallying of the family and the care which each of us deserves each day, from one another. The joy of this play, for me, is the fact that truths about human nature are common to us all, the honesty of the heart trumps all, and good character is cultivated through literature, other people, and being honest to oneself.

~AB

The Playwrights

Lauren Gunderson is one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015 topping the list thrice including 2022/23. She is a two-time winner of the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I and You* and *The Book of Will*, the winner of the Lanford Wilson Award and the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award, a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and John Gassner Award for Playwriting, and a recipient of the Mellon Foundation's Residency with Marin Theatre Company. She studied Southern Literature and Drama at Emory University, and Dramatic Writing at NYU's Tisch School where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship. Her play *The Catastrophist*, about her husband virologist Nathan Wolfe, premiered digitally in January 2021. She co-authored the *Miss Bennet* plays with Margot Melcon, and *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* premiered off-Broadway and at Audible.com. Her work is published at Playscripts (*I and You*; *Exit Pursued By A Bear*; *The Taming* and *Toil And Trouble*), Dramatists Play Service (*The Revolutionists*; *The Book of Will*; *Silent Sky*; *Bauer*; *Natural Shocks*, *The Wickhams* and *Miss Bennet*) and Samuel French (*Emilie*). Her picture book *Dr Wonderful: Blast Off to the Moon* is available from Two Lions/Amazon. She is the book writer for musicals with Ari Afsar (*Jeannette*), Dave Stewart and Joss Stone (*The Time Traveller's Wife*), Joriah Kwamé (*Sinister*), Kait Kerrigan and Bree Lowdermilk (*Justice* and *Earthrise*), and Kira Stone (*Built for This*). She is a board member of The Playwrights Foundation. LaurenGunderson.com

Margot Melcon is a theater artist, administrator and writer. She was the Director of New Play Development at Marin Theatre Company for seven years, where she dramaturged over 30 productions—including six world premieres—and administered the company's two annual new play prizes and commissioning program. She has developed plays with TheatreWorks, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Crowded Fire Theater, Shotgun Players, Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor, the Kennedy Center, the New Harmony Project, and the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis. She is currently the Program Executive for Promoting Culture at the Zellerbach Family Foundation. Margot is a graduate of California State University, Chico. <http://www.shakespeare.org>

Jane Austen

A Brief Biography

Citation: The Jane Austen Society of North America. <https://www.jasna.org/austen/>. 8 November, 2023.

Jane Austen (1775-1817), one of England's foremost novelists, was never publicly acknowledged as a writer during her lifetime.

Austen was born on December 16, 1775, at Steventon Rectory in Hampshire, the seventh child of a country clergyman and his wife, George and Cassandra Austen. Her closest friend was her only sister, Cassandra, almost three years her senior.

Education and Influences |



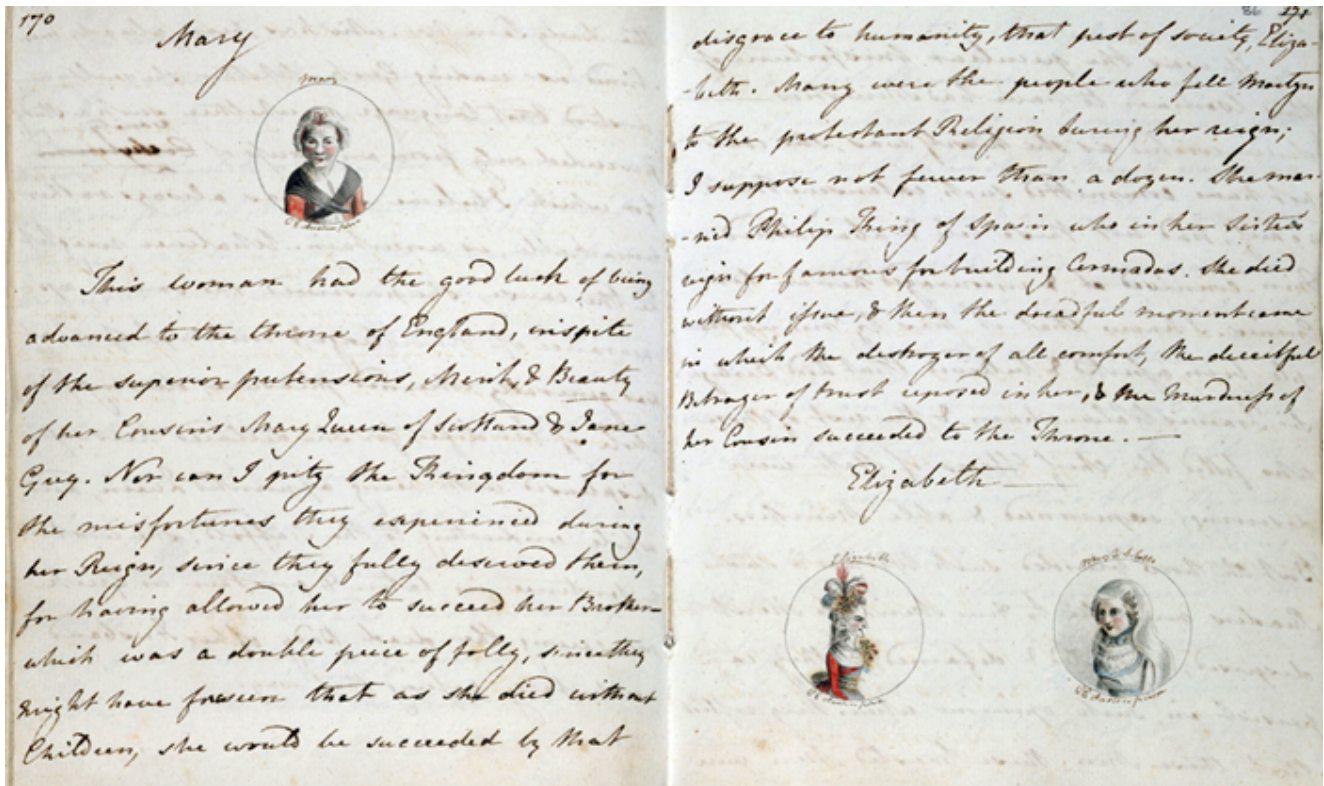
St. Nicholas Church, Steventon, where Jane Austen was baptized. (Photo copyright Allan Soedring)

Jane Austen was primarily educated at home, benefiting from her father's extensive library and the schoolroom atmosphere created by Mr. Austen's live-in pupils.

Though she lived a quiet life, she had unusual access to the greater world, primarily through her brothers. Francis (Frank) and Charles, officers in the Royal Navy, served on ships around the world and saw action in the Napoleonic Wars. Henry, who eventually became a clergyman like his father and his brother James, was an officer in the militia and later a banker. Austen visited Henry in London, where she attended the theater, art exhibitions, and social events and also corrected proofs of her novels. Her brother Edward was adopted by wealthy cousins, the Knights, becoming their heir and later taking their name. On extended visits to Godmersham, Edward's estate in Kent, Austen and her sister took part in the privileged life of the landed gentry, which is reflected in all her fiction.

Early Works: 1787-1798 |

Manuscript of "The History of England," written by Jane Austen and illustrated by her sister Cassandra. (British Library)



As a child Austen began writing comic stories, now referred to as the Juvenilia. Her first mature work, composed when she was about 19, was a novella, *Lady Susan*, written in epistolary form (as a series of letters). This early fiction was preserved by her family but was not published until long after her death.

In her early twenties Austen wrote the novels that later became *Sense and Sensibility* (first called “Elinor and Marianne”) and *Pride and Prejudice* (originally “First Impressions”). Her father sent a letter offering the manuscript of “First Impressions” to a publisher soon after it was finished in 1797, but his offer was rejected by return post.

Austen continued writing, revising “Elinor and Marianne” and completing a novel called “Susan” (later to become *Northanger Abbey*). In 1803 Austen sold “Susan” for £10 to a publisher, who promised early publication, but the manuscript languished in his archives until it was repurchased a year before Austen’s death for the price the publisher had paid her.

View facsimiles of Austen's Juvenilia notebooks, including the *History of England*, on the [Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts Digital Edition](https://www.jane-austen.org/fiction/manuscripts/) website.

Bath and Southampton Years: 1801-1809 |



*No. 4 Sydney Place, Bath
(Photo copyright Allan Soedring)*

When Austen was 25 years old, her father retired, and she and Cassandra moved with their parents to Bath, residing first at 4 Sydney Place. During the five years she lived in Bath (1801-1806), Austen began one novel, *The Watsons*, which she never completed. After Mr. Austen's death, Austen's brothers contributed funds to assist their sisters and widowed mother. Mrs. Austen and her daughters set up housekeeping with their close friend Martha Lloyd. Together they moved to Southampton in 1806 and economized by sharing a house with Frank and his family.

Mature Novels and Publishing Success: 1809-1817 |



*Chawton Cottage, now Jane Austen's House
(Photo copyright Allan Soedring)*

In 1809 Edward provided the women a comfortable cottage in the village of Chawton, near his Hampshire manor house. This was the beginning of Austen's most productive period. In 1811, at the age of 35, Austen published *Sense and Sensibility*, which identified the author as "a Lady." *Pride and Prejudice* followed in

1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814, and *Emma* in 1815. The title page of each book referred to one or two of Austen's earlier novels—capitalizing on her growing reputation—but did not provide her name.

Austen began writing the novel that would be called *Persuasion* in 1815 and finished it the following year, by which time, however, her health was beginning to fail. The probable cause of her illness was Addison's Disease. In 1816 Henry Austen repurchased the rights to "Susan," which Austen revised and renamed "Catherine."

Final Months: 1817 |



*No. 8 College Street, Winchester, where Jane Austen died.
(Photo copyright Allan Soedring)*

During a brief period of strength early in 1817, Austen began the fragment later called *Sanditon*, but by March she was too ill to work. On April 27, 1817, she wrote [her will](#), naming Cassandra as her heir. In May she and Cassandra moved to 8 College Street in Winchester to be near her doctor. Austen died in the early hours of July 18, 1817, and a few days later was buried in Winchester Cathedral. She was 41 years old. Interestingly, her gravestone, which is visited by hundreds of admirers each year, does not even mention

that she was an author.

Persuasion and *Northanger Abbey* were published together in December 1817 with a “Biographical Notice” written by Henry, in which Jane Austen was, for the first time in one of her novels, identified as the author of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*.

Rank and Class Jane Austen and the Regency Period

“Because sometimes it just helps to know your place in the pecking order

During Jane Austen's time, English society revolved around a social hierarchy that managed much of what one did or could say. This then reflected much on your particular position within the British Empire (and other similar establishments elsewhere). One's rank (title, or lack thereof) greatly determined one's social class and inherent benefits of "the good life". Royalty was always held in the highest position by default though, even among royals, there proved a pecking order of sorts, an order that - in some form - still exists even today. Below is a basic listing of various ranks and their respective orders which prove useful in piecing together a perspective from which Jane Austen approached her very works.

Royalty (called 'your Majesty' or 'your Highness'):	Baronet
King	Knight
Queen	Landed gentry (land-owners)
Prince	
Princess	*To distinguish between a noble Lady (i.e. daughter of an earl) and a non-noble Lady (i.e. wife of a knight), the first name of a noblewoman was used with her title. For example: Lady Catherine de Bourgh is of noble lineage while Lady Lucas is not.
Nobility (called 'Lord/Lady'):	
Duke	
Marquis	
Earl	
Viscount	Other Gentlemen (called 'Mister' or rank title 'Captain, Colonel, etc...'):
Baron	Affluent businessmen
Commoners (called 'Sir/Lady' or 'Mister/Mrs.')	Navy and Army officers
	Clergymen” ²

Regency Period Primer

Jane Austen and the Regency Period

“The Regency Period officially began when the Prince of Wales (later King George IV) assumed the role of Prince Regent after his father, King George III, was declared unfit to rule in 1811. King George III is believed to have suffered from porphyria, a disorder affecting the production of hemoglobin (a component of blood cells). Symptoms include abdominal pain, sensitivity to light and nervous system issues. Problems with the nervous system can affect both muscle control as well and cognition. After his behavior became erratic and unpredictable, King George III surrendered rule to his son. An example of his ‘madness’ occurred when he addressed his court as “My Lords and Peacocks” instead of “My Lords and Ladies”. George IV, his son, became Prince Regent – not quite King as George III was still alive, but wielding the power of the king when his father became debilitated and lost focus of reality.

While King George III is best remembered for going mad at the end of his life, he is also remembered for being king while the American colonies revolted against British rule in the 1770’s. He did not create the taxing policies which led the American colonists to seek independence; those were passed through British Parliament. He opposed the independence of the American colonies however, and the eventual loss of them greatly affected his popularity.

In the 1780’s Parliament agreed to increase the young Prince’s allowance even though his then-coherent father stated that it was "a shameful squandering of public money to gratify the passions

² *Rank and Class*. JaneAusten.org 8 November, 2023.

of an ill-advised young man.” It was a foreshadowing of what was to come once the Prince took the throne.

Once in power in 1811, the Prince Regent was discouraged from making decisions regarding official governing business and issues involving war. Instead, the Prince Regent spent his time indulging in excesses. He spent more money than the Treasury could cover on building projects and lavish parties, thus leaving the burden of restocking the coffers to the people he ruled. He was a great patron of the arts and literature and created Regent’s Park, but was extravagant in fashion and indulgent with food, becoming quite obese. This reputation of excesses and self-indulgence likely led to Jane Austen’s dislike of him.

Upon finishing her novel, *Emma*, the Prince Regent gave her 'the honor' of dedicating it to him. Unable to disregard a royal charge, Jane used her words in the dedication to show her disdain:

'To His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, this work is, by His Royal Highness's permission, most respectfully dedicated to His Royal Highness by His dutiful and obedient humble servant, the Author.'

After nine years as Prince Regent, George IV assumed the throne upon the death of his father in 1820, becoming King George IV. As king, all the promises he made to his friends in the Whig party were reneged and King George IV became a staunch supporter of the Tory party and its initiatives, just like his father. He eventually died in 1830, ten years after his father, but left such a legacy as to have a period of history named after him: the Regency.”³

How Christmas Trees Became a Holiday Tradition

Citation: Waxman, Olivia B. *Time*. <https://time.com/5736523/history-of-christmas-trees/>. 8 Originally published December 5, 2019.

Records of using greenery to celebrate the holidays predate widespread use of the phrase “Christmas tree.” Rural English church records from the 15th and 16th centuries indicate that holly and ivy were bought in the winter — hence the British carol “The Holly and the Ivy.” Private houses and streets were also decorated with greenery at this time, according to Judith Flanders’ *Christmas: A Biography*. Flanders posits that a precursor to the Christmas tree can be seen in the pole that parishes would decorate with holly and ivy, like a winter Maypole; one account describes a storm in London that knocked over a pole that’s described as “for disport of Christmas to the people.”

A lot of myths surround the origins of Christmas trees. One legend says that Martin Luther, who catalyzed the Protestant Reformation, believed that pine trees represented the goodness of God. Another myth popular in the 15th century tells the story of St. Boniface, who in the 8th century thwarted a pagan human sacrifice under an oak tree by cutting down that tree; a fir tree grew in

³*Regency Period Primer*. JaneAusten.org. 8 November, 2023.



its place, with its branches representing Christ's eternal truth. Some versions of this St. Boniface legend say he cut down the new fir tree and hung it upside down, which is believed to have led to the tradition of trees being hung upside down to represent the Holy Trinity — sometimes with an apple wedged at the point instead of a star. All of these stories may have helped the Christmas tradition spread.

But the real origins of Christmas trees appear to be rooted in present-day Germany during the Middle Ages.

In 1419, a guild in Freiburg put up a tree decorated with apples, flour-paste wafers, tinsel and gingerbread. In “Paradise Plays” that were performed to celebrate the feast day of Adam and Eve, which fell on Christmas Eve, a tree of knowledge was represented by an evergreen fir with apples tied to its branches. Flanders finds documentation of trees decorated with wool thread, straw, apples, nuts and pretzels.

The oldest Christmas tree market is thought to have been located just over the southwestern German border in Strasbourg in Alsace (which was back then part of the Rhineland, now in present-day France), where unadorned Christmas trees were sold during the 17th century as *Weihnachtsbaum*, German for Christmas tree. Flanders says the “first decorated indoor tree” was recorded in 1605, in Strasbourg, decorated with roses, apples, wafers and other sweets, according to her research.

Demand for Christmas trees was so high in the 15th century that laws were passed in Strasbourg cracking down on people cutting pine branches. Ordinances throughout the region of Alsace limited each household to one tree in the 1530s.

How Christmas trees got popular

References to Christmas trees in private homes or establishments in North America date back to the late 18th century and early 19th century. Flanders mentions a reference to a pine tree in North Carolina in 1786. In 1805, a school for American Indians run by Moravian missionaries sent students “to fetch a small green tree for Christmas.” Similar examples pop up in the first half of the 19th century in the Midwest and further West, such as the German immigrants in Texas who decorated trees with moss, cotton, pecans, red pepper swags and popcorn.

But the image of a decorated Christmas tree with presents underneath has a very specific origin: an engraving of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and their children gathering around a Christmas tree, eyeing the presents underneath, published in the *Illustrated London News* in 1848. The premier women's magazine in America back then, *Godey's Lady's Book*, reprinted a version of the image a couple of years later as “The Christmas Tree.”

Illustrations of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and their children gathered around their Christmas tree helped popularize this tradition in the U.S. Getty Images

“This single image cemented the Christmas tree in the popular consciousness, so much so that by 1861, the year of Albert’s death, it was firmly believed that this German prince had transplanted the custom to England with him when he married,” writes Flanders.

Things to discuss

Things to think about, prior to the performance:

- Have you ever heard read any of Jane Austen’s six novels or seen some version of them on television, film or in live theater?
- What is your expectation of this story?
- Do you think people were different in 1815 than they are today and why or why not?
- Why do you think that people still read these novels and follow them in 2023?

Things to watch for in performance:

- Notice the set pieces, the furniture, the costume pieces and the prop pieces. What do the colors and shapes make you feel?
- Notice the layering of sound, both before the performance begins and during the production.
- Notice the effect of the transitions between scenes. Watch the behavior and small moments between the characters.
- Notice the location of this play. Look through the windows. Notice the fireplace and the books.
- What does the pianoforte add to the play? What is the reason Mary plays it so well?
- Notice the effect of the light on the different scenic elements. What are the different spaces established by the set and how does the light effect your experience?
- Notice the relationship between the characters. What is the effect of family on one or all of them? Are these people so very different from one another? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Notice the “choices” that are voiced by all of the characters. Who has them and who does not? And why?
- Notice the shared lines within the play. Notice all the characters seem to note the restrictions and lack of choice that they feel.
- Notice the references to “tree” and “foundation.”
- What is your reaction to the end of the production? What does this say about human relationships?

Things to think about after the performance:

- Why would the playwrights construct a story around the end of a novel AFTER it was over?
- What do you think happens to Mary and Arthur?
- Why do you think maps are important to these characters?
- Why is family so important to the characters in this play?

Other tools after the performance:

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, WHAT happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is ‘about?’
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwrights decide that this was the most quintessential title for their work?

The running time for this production is approximately 2 hours, including intermission

Please note the **pre-show** discussion will take place prior to the preview performance, **Thursday, November 16, in MAC 140 from 6:45 pm – 7:15 pm**. The pre-show discussion will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production.

The **post-show discussion** will take place on **Friday, November 24, following the performance**. The post-show will include the director, cast and crew who will answer questions from the audience.

Please note: there will not be a performance on Thursday, Nov. 23, Thanksgiving.

Saturday, Nov. 25 has two performances: 3p and 8p



ASL Performance: Thursday, December 7, 2023

ASL interpreters will be located near the stage for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing, seated in an area of the theater that gives the best sight lines to follow the interpretation and the action on stage. To access reserved seating in view of the

interpreters for a signed performance, call the box office at [630.942.4000](tel:630.942.4000) or [630.858.9692](tel:630.858.9692) (TDD).