

MOODBOARD FOR

SENSE & SENSIBILITY



CONCEPT

I wish to create a joyous and relevant version of my adaptation of the classic *Sense and Sensibility*. I want to bring the humour out of it but also the heart and genuine deep emotions. I want to create a vigorous and physical piece of theatre that moves both onstage and in the audience's hearts. I want music to be very important within it.

CAST

This production will have 22 characters portrayed by 6 actors. I choose to only cast women as a nod to both my solo show style but mainly to Jane Austen who was denied so much simply as she was a woman. I want strong character actresses and some musical prowess.

THE LOOK

As per the previous pictures from an adaptation overseas I want a design similar to my solo shows which are all about colour. Traditional costume shapes, but bold materials, and innovative sets. Also ingenuity with small costume changes to denote switches, rather than full costume change. Similarly the set and props will reinvent themselves in surprising ways.



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Writer's Note - Court Theatre
Programme

When asked to adapt a classic for The Court I knew it had to be Sense and Sensibility as I have always loved its eloquence, romance and hilarious spinster shade. So I set about transferring all of that onto 6 women who will play 25 of Austen's beautifully drawn characters.

I chose to write this for women only as an homage to the brilliant Jane herself, who struggled her whole adult life to be published due to her sex. When she was finally published in 1811 aged 35, her name was not listed as the author, it being unseemly for a gentlewoman. By 1815 even the Prince Regent was a fan, but by 1817 she was dead. Her gravestone does not even mention her books. And so I choose women to celebrate Austen, who was denied so much because she was one. And I cannot wait to see this glorious cast and crew bring her wit and sparkle to life.

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The lure of Jane Austen remains strong as she is focussed on things we all are; the search for love AND security.

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In addition, despite being 200 years old, Sense and Sensibility's themes of the plight of women relating to housing insecurity, when suddenly losing a spouse, could not be more relevant. Sadly.

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But Sense and Sensibility also celebrate romance and love amongst the social commentary, and in these "interesting times" some joy accompanied with some good old feminism, is a winning tonic.

P

enny Ashton has directed numerous Improv Genre Long Form shows such as Austen Found and Oliver Twisted. She also directed Dangerman and Awkward Boy in the NZ comedy Festival.

She has also overseen numerous aspects of her own solo shows such as music selection, co-arranging with Robbie Ellis (purely structure, he's the musical whizz) costume, set and lighting design.

Penny is looking forward to relishing this opportunity to direct a larger show. The run of the show at The Court not only made budget but was the third highest grossing show in its time slot in the Court's history. So it can be successful, but Penny is keen to realise the show exactly as she imagined it.

Penny has a very strong following in Wellington as evidenced by her very successful runs in Circa Two. Also Austen Found at Bats in the Comedy Festival sold out completely before it even opened. Proving the cult of Jane Austen shows no sign of waning.



REVIEWS

By Erin Harrington

As declarations of love are shared it's so earnest and heartfelt, so beautifully romantic, that both my companion and I feel quite teary. The final image is perfection. Gah! After an evening of some of my favourite silly things – ridiculous characterisation, visual gags, wardrobe malfunctions, arch humour, Eilish Moran giggling inanely and Kathleen Burns in drag – that's quite the achievement.

More than that, we come away happy and feeling good. Comedy is hard to do – it's serious stuff – and this is bloody funny.

Just ask the women behind me who whispered a running commentary on how wonderful they thought the actors were. Female actors rarely get such opportunities to really let rip, and I commend The Court for supporting more women to direct mainstage productions. It might take a while to settle in if you have come hoping for a straight period drama, but if you meet the play where it's at and loosen up a bit there's more than enough to win you over. Swoon.

By Ruth Agnew

Penny Ashton's adaptation is perfection, leaning into Austen's ever present wry humour without losing the light touch and subtlety. As a long-standing Austen devotee, I enjoyed watching Ashton's deft reimagining of the familiar sisters and suitors. A knowledge of the novel is not a necessity, however. I attended in the company of a trio who had never read the book or seen a film version, and they found the play as entertaining and engaging as I did, with no problems understanding the plot or people.

A few years ago, the Court Theatre's main-stage season was almost entirely comprised of shows written and directed by men. Sense and Sensibility is an entertaining, empowering celebration of women, and one of the best Court Theatre shows I have seen in recent memory.





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