



CITADEL THEATRE

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY



Mikaela Davies has worked extensively as an actor, director, and creator in Toronto. Having spent a few years at Soulpepper Theatre (*Spoon River*, *The Crucible*, *Marat/Sade*, *Idiot's Delight*, *The Dybbuk*), Mikaela moved to The Stratford Festival (*Breath of Kings*, *Madwoman of Chailot*, *Timon of Athens*) where, in her second season, she performed the leading role of Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*. She also assistant directed Robert Lepage on his lauded production of *Coriolanus* at Stratford, and is currently developing a musical. Mikaela plays Mary Bennet in the Citadel Theatre's *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*.

Citadel Theatre: What character are you playing and how would you describe her?

Mikaela Davies: I'm playing Mary Bennet. Jane Austen would describe her as perhaps bookish, pompous, studious - she's very fact based. She is a character that operates from a sense of intellect and logic.

CT: Mary is part of the Bennet family, which is an iconic Jane Austen family. What is it like playing a character that is known but not incredibly well-known. Are you taking a lot from the original source material?

MD: Yeah, I've been going through it because it's such a gift, as an actor, to have a biography for your character already written, so [I'm] going back and seeing what she was like two years ago. But certainly, this [play] departs from that. Mary has come into her own. She's grown up, she's matured and she's starting to look at the world in a different way, with much more curiosity and interest.

CT: You play piano quite a bit throughout the play. You have experience playing piano but you had a little mishap during your audition. Can you tell us what happened?

MD: So, I used to play piano as a kid. I was not terribly dedicated - I never did any of the grades or the exams. But I enjoyed it and I had a Russian piano teacher who focused on Beethoven. I hadn't played in years, but one of the songs that I kept up [playing] passingly well was *Moonlight Sonata*. When I was auditioning for [*Miss Bennet*], I saw that Mary plays the *Moonlight Sonata* and I thought, 'Oh my god, this is so serendipitous.' I passed this [information] along to my agent, who passed it along to **Nancy McAlear**, the director [of *Miss Bennet*]. (Continued on next page)



CITADEL THEATRE

(Continued from the previous page) It came up during my audition and I said ‘I can play it.’ And she said, ‘Oh, I thought we might have to use a recording,’ and I said, ‘No, we can have it live in the space,’ so it was fantastic, and I booked the part. I borrowed a friend’s piano and I’m going through the play again and I see *Moonlight Sonata* and all of this writing. So I thought ‘Uh, oh.’ I took all the writing and copy and pasted it into Google and I realize it’s *the Moonlight Sonata 3rd Movement*, which is *not* a song I knew how to play. It’s, to me, one of the most difficult classical piano pieces that I’ve ever heard. I have been teaching myself the *Moonlight Sonata 3rd Movement* for this play.

CT: How long have you been practicing for?

MD: I have been preparing on and off for a couple of months. I’ve been borrowing or renting pianos when I can and making my way through [the music]. I took a couple of lessons when I was at Stratford so that set

me up a bit. And I don’t have to play the complete piece - it’s the first 20 seconds and it moves at a clip. It is at a point in the play where Mary is, for the first time, standing up for herself and trying to show her sisters who she has become and that no one really sees her clearly. So, of course, Mary doesn’t need to be a classical pianist, she doesn’t need to be a professional - it’s okay if she makes mistakes. But for her, I want to do it well.

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CT: Are there parts of your character that you really identify with?

MD: Sure! As a kid, growing up, I was a complete bookworm. I would rather read books, I think, than speak to people. I loved escaping into different worlds. I really identify with that. I’m also someone who leads with my mind. And the Mary that she’s turning into in [*Miss Bennet*], I do identify with her.

CT: You have a lot of experience at Stratford. Can you tell us about your work there?

MD: My first professional experience started at Soulpepper Theatre in Toronto. I did the actor’s academy there, and a few shows. And then I moved on to the Stratford Festival, where I’ve worked for two seasons as an actor and last season as an assistant director.

CT: What first attracted you to acting?

MD: I was a really shy kid and I had this very clear moment in a class in elementary school where I was asked to get up and do an improv and I was supposed to play a hostile person. And it was the first time I felt a sense of power and taking up of space that I had never felt as myself, and that became a life-long curiosity.



CITADEL THEATRE

CT: What are you hoping the audience will get out of seeing the show?

MD: It's a gorgeous play. It's very well-written. And I think anyone who is familiar with the story of *Pride and Prejudice* will get a kick out of seeing where these characters are now. But as Nancy McAlear aptly said on our first day [of rehearsal], this is really a story of a young girl who is looking for more than what society expects of her and is looking for a kind of love that not only matches her but propels her, as opposed to one that ties her down and is deemed as acceptable. She wants more than what is offered at that time, and I think that is a bit of a universal tale.

CT: This is a holiday play. What are some of your favourite holiday traditions?

MD: I always spend Christmas at home in Montreal with my parents. When my grandmother was alive, we always used to do Christmas Day at her house, so that is something that I grew up, so that's something that my parents and I still keep in our hearts, even though we're not able to do that anymore. But we always do a Christmas Eve dinner and my stepfather always makes chicken - fabulous chicken!

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CT: Mary is the middle child with four sisters. Do you have any siblings?

MD: I'm an only child, actually. I'm very underqualified to be playing this part! I do not have siblings, so what has been so fun is to sift through these sisterly relationships, which are so filled with love but also a lot of jealousy and resentment and frustrations. I find those really human, interesting things.

CT: Mary has a different type of relationship with each sister. Her and Lydia snipe at each other throughout the script.

MD: They certainly do. Lydia is a little bit younger than her and yet, Lydia has gotten married before her, shown an interest in men before her, attracted men way before Mary, so there is a bit of competitiveness there, and I think Mary feels, in some ways, unseen by her sisters. They're still treating her as the child that she once was and they're not letting her become the woman that she is.

Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley takes place November 17 to December 9, 2018, in Shoctor Theatre at the Citadel Theatre. For more information or to purchase tickets, call the Box Office at 780.425.1820 or visit www.citadeltheatre.com.