



CITADEL THEATRE

MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY



Umed Amin is an actor based in Toronto. This is his first time working at the Citadel Theatre. We sat down with him to discuss his role as Arthur de Bourgh in *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*.

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

Umed Amin: I'm playing Arthur de Bourgh and I would describe him as an unsociable bookworm. Unfortunately, both of his parents have died and he's been at Oxford studying for many years. He ends up [coming] to the Pemberley estate because Mr. Darcy invites him, knowing he doesn't have any family. And, because of certain circumstances, he just became a Lord. So he's kind of put in a situation where he now has grand estate and a bunch of money but all he wants to do is just stay in a library and read all day. He's trapped between social customs and norms and wanting to say 'I don't want any of that.'

CT: And he's not a part of the original Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice* story, correct?

UA: He's created for this [play] specifically. I think he's a good choice. It's historical, because the story focuses on Mary and finally finding a match for Mary. As I understand it, she's not a big part of the actual book. I feel bad because a lot of the time, she's the butt of the joke. It's really nice to see her get fully fleshed out as a character. She's quite witty and [there's] incredible dialogue with Mary, which I really enjoy. That's one of the things that brought me into this - I read the script and thought 'wow.' A big pet peeve of mine in plays is when there's a bunch of women on stage and they're just talking about men and what the men do for them. This play doesn't do that, which I think is fantastic.

CT: Is this first period piece that you've done?

UA: I did *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, and that takes place in the 1930s in New York, so that was a period piece. But this is the farthest back I've gone - 1815. It's quite difficult because every mannerism, from how you stand and such, has to really connect. It's all etiquette, things that we don't talk about; it's just behind [the dialogue]. I think anyone that appreciates the period will see that but it's difficult, as an actor, because there aren't those social norms today that you have to follow or you'll get ostracized.



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CT: What first attracted you to acting?

UA: I remember watching *Charlie's Angels* when I was like, six years old. And for some reason - I think I had a crush on Lucy Liu - I was like, oh, that would be a fun thing to do. But what really got me into it was that I moved from Hamilton to Toronto, specifically, Scarborough. There's this school called Wexford and a lot of famous people

have come out of it. They have a very prestigious drama program called Drama Focus. I went in Grade 10, so I didn't get a chance to audition for it, so I was in Open Drama and the teacher who ran it saw me and said 'Oh, he should be in Drama Focus. We'll sign him in.' So I always wanted to do it but it sort of happened in a way where someone was like 'Oh yeah, he's got it, so let's put him in' and from there, it just kept happening. I was very, very lucky to, just out of school, get a show right away and go right into the union, which a lot of people are afraid to do but it's where I wanted to end up, so I figured, why not?

"I love the clothing. Everyone looks like sexy Count Dracula. It's pretty great." -Umed Amin

CT: This is your first time working at the Citadel. What has your experience been like so far?

UA: It's been amazing. I won't lie - when I first got the audition, I was like 'Oh, the Citadel.' I had heard of it but I didn't quite know how big it was and then I talked to a few friends ... I think the greatest thing has been how accommodating they are. It feels like working in a little theatre. It's so personal and close, and on the first day, Daryl Cloran, the artistic director, came and introduced everyone and he was really, really nice. It feels like a family here, which is amazing. I do a lot of film work and a lot of times, you're just on set, waiting for someone to call you in. A lot of the time, you don't get to really meet the other actors or do anything [together]. It's been quite surprising, to be honest.

CT: What are some of the other Canadian theatres that you've worked at?

UA: Factory Theatre, which does a lot of new Canadian work and Indigenous plays. They were the first professional theatre I worked with, and I got plucked right out of school for that, which was fantastic. After that, I went on to do things with the Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company and the Toronto Centre for the Arts. My goal is to get into Ed Mirvish - any of the Mirvish theatres. I want to work for Soulpepper and I want to work for Stratford. It's one of those things where people are like, 'rein it back,' but I think I've been very lucky so far and a lot of it has come from just believing that you can do something. If you told me I'd be here just two years ago, I'd be like, 'Okay, we'll see' but now it's at the point where you sort of learn to trust yourself and want to do the best work you can and keep moving up.



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CT: A lot of what we do here at the Citadel includes student performances, student talk backs, Students Club, et cetera, so a lot of students will be seeing the show. Do you think younger viewers will be able to connect with Miss Bennet?

UA: One hundred per cent. It's one of those things where the core of it is still what's at play with two humans. And, the language - at first you might think that it could be alienating but it's really not because the story of love, the story of change, the story of opening up your heart, and transformation is such a common, human theme that I think anyone can sort of sink into it. And the comedy helps. I think putting comedy in something, whether it's something that's deeply dark or something that's just meant to be funny, can help connect audiences. It takes the divider and just closes that gap.

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CT: Have you ever worked with **Mikaela Davies**, who plays Mary Bennet?

UA: No, this is my first time, and she's fantastic. She's simply amazing. Sometimes, I've literally forgotten my lines because I'm watching her act and then go 'I'm so sorry, I was literally just thinking about how good you are. Can we go back?' And she's so humble, which is the crazy thing. It's like when you meet an actor who you really respect and then they're the nicest person. It's the greatest feeling in the world, as opposed to when you meet an actor that you really respect and they're mean to you - and that breaks your heart. She's super dedicated, super hard-working and really, naturally good. That's the dream. I've been very lucky. When I saw her resume, I was like, 'that's going to be hard to match,' but she's been so accommodating and so open in a way that I truly have not had from many other actors, so it's been really great.

CT: What's it been like working with the director, **Nancy McAlear**?

UA: Great! She's such an actor/director, and because she has spent so much time acting, she knows exactly what ... she can see an impulse that I don't follow and go 'I think I saw you wanting to do this. Is that true?' and I'm like 'Yes!' And she does, I think, a lot of work in comedy because her knack for it is pretty great. Sometimes, we'll have a bit and we'll wonder why it's not working. She'll give the simplest note ... and then we'll do it, and it's brilliant. She's done that over and over again.

CT: Have you done any costume fittings? Do you know what you'll be wearing?



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UA: I love the clothing. Everyone looks like sexy Count Dracula. It's pretty great. It forces you to keep your posture [correct]. It's quite scintillating.

CT: Have you been doing a lot of work with **Doug Mertz**, the dialect coach for *Miss Bennet*?

UA: Yes, he'll pull us aside every couple of days and we'll get a little session with him. That is probably the thing that I was most nervous about when I got this role. It's not that I didn't think I could do it - I love doing dialects - but Queen's English is very difficult. Right now, I'm having trouble with the word 'marriage.' He would take all of these things and differentiate them but he does it in a way where you just follow the vowels and the consonants will follow that. And remember to link a consonant to a vowel. When you learn the technique of that, it comes naturally, which is really nice.

CT: Since this is a holiday show, what are some of your favourite holiday traditions?

UA: In Toronto, there's something called the Toronto Star Santa Claus Fund, and you deliver toys to lower-income families. I started doing that three years ago. I did it because I was in a weird place in my life. I was going through a break-up and when I'm going through a break-up, I try to focus on something that will give back, and that helps me, in a way. I admit, the reason for doing it was selfish. But when you see the look on these kids' faces, who get these toys that they didn't expect and they didn't think that they would have a Christmas, it's the most gratifying feeling in the world. You feel like a hero. This will be my third year running that I do it. I have this thing with my family where I tell them not to give me gifts because I don't like the weird corporate part of Christmas. I think the important part is family coming together and the closeness aspect of that. I spend most of November and December doing that, and then on actual Christmas Day, will hang out with my family and call up a bunch of my friends that don't celebrate Christmas because I know they'll be free and hang out with them.

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.