

Review: 4 reasons not to miss 'Sense and Sensibility' at Nashville Rep

[Amy Stumpfl](#)

Nashville Repertory Theatre kicked off its 2017-18 season last weekend with an especially clever take on Jane Austen's beloved "Sense and Sensibility."

The familiar story follows the devoted Dashwood sisters, sensible Elinor and spirited Marianne, after their father's untimely death leaves them in a precarious situation, both financially and socially.

Here are four reasons you won't want to miss this vibrant production:

A brilliant adaptation

Kate Hamill's adaptation, which first premiered off-Broadway in 2014, is fresh and surprisingly funny. Her affection for Austen's work is obvious, and yet she manages to infuse the classic tale with decidedly modern and innovative touches. Especially brilliant is her use of the ever-present "Gossips" — a playful Greek chorus of sorts, used to highlight the societal pressures of 18th-century England.

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More: [Nashville Children's Theatre opens 87th season with 'The Hundred Dresses'](#)

Fast-paced staging

René D. Copeland's direction is flawless, with one scene melting into the

next with a playful nod and a knowing smile. She maintains a brisk pace throughout, but takes care not to rush us, as we savor each delicious bit of humor and heartache.

Under her watch, moving topiaries enliven a garden stroll, while benches provide an exciting carriage ride. And Marianne's collapse on the stormy moor is beautifully executed, with the Gossips creating the billowing wind in highly theatrical fashion.

Artful design

Gary C. Hoff's elegant scenic design is a vision in creams and golds, with artful landscapes in the background. But it's also quite versatile — with everything from doors and windows to furniture placed on casters — emphasizing the script's innate fluidity. Meanwhile, Phillip Franck's gorgeous lighting reflects and builds upon the story's emotional arc. And Trish Clark's impeccable costumes tell a story all their own.



Eric D. Pasto-Crosby, Lauren Berst, Rona Carter, Shawn Knight and Christopher Strand in

Fabulous performances

As usual, Copeland has assembled a remarkable ensemble, starting with Emily Landham as Elinor. Landham brings an almost regal air of restraint to each scene, while still allowing every heartbeat to register fully upon her lovely face.

Morgan Davis also is perfectly cast as the more impulsive Marianne, bringing an unmistakable sense of joy and youthful optimism to the role.

And Eric D. Pasto-Crosby is delightfully awkward as the dutiful Edward, sharing a nice, believable chemistry with Landham. He also earns big laughs as Edward's self-important brother — a self-proclaimed cottage aficionado.

Other standouts include Rona Carter (hilarious as the prattling Mrs. Jennings) and Shawn Knight (animated and earnest in multiple roles). And I would be remiss not to mention Cheryl White and Lauren Berst, who take on various characters with distinctive style, and also give us one of the most uproarious catfights ever caught on stage.

Entertaining and exhilarating, this "Sense and Sensibility" marks a promising start to Nashville Rep's new season.

If you go

What: Nashville Repertory Theatre presents "Sense and Sensibility"

When: Through Sept. 23. Performances at 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays-Thursdays; 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; with Saturday matinees at 2:30 p.m. Sept. 16 and 23.

Where: TPAC's Johnson Theater, 505 Deaderick St.

Tickets: starting at \$45

Contact: nashvillerep.org or 615-782-4040

