**Sense and Sensibility Programme Notes**

**Please note this document may contain spoilers.**

**Characters and Costume**

This production of Sense and Sensibility features a versatile cast of just four actors (two male, two female), each playing multiple roles. All wear black Converse-style shoes as part of their base costume. The male actors start in black pantaloons, long white socks, and collarless shirts, while the female actors wear long, scooped-neck, floral Regency-style dresses.

The narrative primarily follows sisters Marianne and Elinor, who also serve as narrators.

Marianne, played by a young white woman with brown hair in a bun, wears a pink and white floral dress. The same actress transforms into Lucy Steele by adding a pink shawl and bonnet.

Elinor, also a young white woman with brown hair in a high bun, is distinguished by her blue and white floral dress. This actress doubles as Mrs. Jennings, donning a full-length red dress and round spectacles, and later as John Dashwood's mother-in-law, using a walking stick, black shawl, and bonnet.

Key male characters include Colonel Brandon, John Willoughby, and Edward Ferrars.

One male actor, a young white man with blonde hair and a distinctive Salvador Dali-style moustache, plays both Brandon and Willoughby. His base is a pale pink collarless shirt. As Willoughby, he adds a tartan scarf and old-fashioned motorbike goggles. As Brandon, he wears a black jacket with gold trim and a black top hat.

The other male actor, a young white man with a brown beard, portrays Edward Ferrars in a pale blue collarless shirt, top hat, and a black 'white tie jacket'. He also plays John Dashwood, adding a black 'Morning suit' jacket and very round glasses, and John Middleton, distinguished by a green wax jacket, woolen farmer's flat cap, and a strong West Country accent.

Both male actors also perform as "Butlers" and footmen (all named 'Thomas'), differentiated solely by a change of accent.

During the "Whitwell" party scene, the entire cast wears paper party hats.

**Set and Props**

The play uses an end-on staging, with the audience directly facing the raised stage. The set remains constant throughout, featuring a cream-coloured trellis archway at the back and centre, reminiscent of a rose garden. In front of this, there is a table with a pink and white checkered tablecloth flanked by two white chairs, which ingeniously double as carriage seats.

Tall wooden coat hangers on either side of the stage (one on the left, two on the right) hold various costume pieces. Actors make their character changes on stage, in full view of the audience, using these hangers.

Two diagonally placed benches at the back of the stage serve multiple purposes. Under the bench on the left is a cajon (box drum), played by the actress portraying Marianne during the pre-set and by other members of the cast at various points in the play. Also on this bench are two coconut shells, used to imitate the sound of horse hooves.

Towards the front of the stage, four knee-height Doric-style columns are adorned with colourful flowers and foliage, each topped with a white Converse shoe. A wicker picnic basket to the left of the front-most column contains a picnic rug, champagne bottles, glasses, and a Melodica (referred to as a 'piano forte').

Other on-stage instruments include a banjo, ukulele, and two guitars, all used by the actors throughout the performance. When not in a scene, actors remain on stage in view of the audience (or sometimes amongst the audience), and at times provide live musical accompaniment.

**Key Visual Cues**

This production employs numerous visual gags and interactive elements to enhance storytelling:

* Audience Interaction: Actors frequently engage with the audience. Early on, Marianne sits among the audience, declaring, "I'll sit here," while Elinor narrates.
* Traditional Pantomime Gender-Play & Character Changes: The male actors embrace comedic traditional pantomime gender-play for minor female roles. For instance, the actor playing Willoughby and Brandon also portrays 'Fanny Dashwood' by wearing a bonnet and pink Regency-style dress. A running gag involves the actor playing Edward rushing on in a bonnet and skirt when "Margaret" is mentioned, only for Elinor to state, "well, we had to cut her from the play," before he runs off.
* Elinor & Edward's Awkward Romance: Their blooming love interest is marked by a repeated physical gag where one goes for a handshake and the other a kiss, leading to humorous near-misses. They sing a song about "sensible regency fun," comically bumping heads during a bow. Edward later whispers, "draw me like one of your French girls," leading to him striking a sultry pose while Elinor mimes painting.
* Needlework Insights: When discussing Edward, Marianne and Elinor sew with embroidery hoops; Marianne's darning amusingly reads "Elinor & Edward together." In a later scene, Elinor's darning after Brandon's arrival simply states "#SAD."
* "Walnut Tree" Connection: Marianne lovingly gazes at an audience member when speaking of their home in Norland and its walnut tree.
* The "Low Beam" Gag: A recurring physical comedy involves cast members repeatedly miming hitting their heads on an invisible "low beam" in Barton cottage, sometimes warning others, who then exaggeratedly duck.
* John Middleton's Handshake: Upon his arrival at Barton Cottage, Marianne offers her hand for a kiss, but John Middleton awkwardly taps it. This becomes a recurring feature of his character, who prefers taps or even fist-bumps to a traditional kiss.
* Colonel Brandon's Awkward Silence: When Brandon first meets Marianne, an extended, silent, awkward pause ensues as they stand side-by-side.
* "Rain Danger" Gag: Marianne takes on the role of 'Jane Bennett,' caught in a rain shower. Later, a small spray bottle is used to simulate rain on Marianne.
* Willoughby's Entrancement: Marianne performs a series of sultry poses to entice Willoughby, eventually resting her sprained ankle across chairs as he exhibits bravado and hip thrusts. After Willoughby leaves, John Middleton clumsily moves Marianne's sprained ankle, causing her pain.
* Party Scene Shenanigans: During the party, John Middleton initiates a game of "piggy in the middle" with Colonel Brandon's top hat, tossing it with his mother-in-law and Marianne as Brandon tries to retrieve it.
* Picnic Fun: When Edward visits, Elinor lays out a picnic rug at the front of the stage. Marianne comically attempts to chug champagne from the bottle, only for Elinor to snatch it away.
* "Guess the Mime" Game: Upon Colonel Brandon's arrival in London, Marianne hides under the picnic rug, leading to a game of "guess the mime." Marianne mimes behind Brandon's back, and Mrs. Jennings (or Elinor in a later scene) attempts to interpret her actions into outlandish, comedic and somewhat embarrassing excuses for her absence.
* Elinor & Lucy Steele's Confrontation: The two mime having tea and play various games such as snap and chess at the table, with Elinor performing an elaborate card shuffle. Their conversation escalates into a sharply choreographed dance, to the count of 1,2,3,4, becoming "snappier and snappier" as their dialogue grows more barbed.
* Marianne's Melodrama: During a period of upset, Elinor suggests Marianne "lie down," leading to Marianne dramatically lying down in the middle of the floor, only for Elinor to retort, "no, not there!"
* Comical Duel Flashback: A flashback to the duel between Colonel Brandon and Willoughby is performed by a single actor comically running from one side of the stage to the other, rapidly switching between Brandon's top hat and Willoughby's goggles with each line.