

Laguna Beach's "Emma" marches Forward, Onward, and Upward!
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Emma Woodhouse believes she can orchestrate love like clockwork, but her misread signs lead to unforeseen consequences. Laguna Beach High School's charming production of "Emma" reimagines Jane Austen's classic comedy of romantic meddling, misguided matchmaking, and the humbling power of self-reflection.

Quickly pacing the stage with powerful ambition, Emma Woodhouse (Amelie Ford) commands her social sphere with bright smiles and exaggerated gasps. Ford portrays her childlike persona, jumping in circles frantically, fingers spread as she throws her arms in the air. Her breathless excitement becomes an escape from uncomfortable moments, leaning into impulsive joy to steer attention away from conflict. Yet as Emma's certainty begins to crumble, Ford's voice softens and her assertive posture slumps, exposing vulnerability beneath her confidence.

With observant stillness, Mr. Knightley's (Luke Donaldson) composed stance, grounded tread, and calm, resonant tone create a striking contrast to Emma's bubbly excitement. Donaldson's single raised eyebrow or gentle hand clasp communicates his quiet disappointment, secretly gesturing to his protective demeanor. Warmth creeps into Donaldson's voice in the second act, teetering up and down and shaking his hands by his sides as he splashes tea at Emma in an attempt to capture her heart.

Bright-eyed and eager, Harriet Smith (Mallory Keller) radiates innocence and charm. Bounding onstage with delighted steps and clasped hands, she hangs onto Emma's every word with trusting eyes. Keller's rounded vowels and airy tone highlight Harriet's naive optimism, but in moments of heartbreak, her shrinking shoulders and amplified wails express her desperate yearning for romantic connection. Through subtle shifts in posture and confidence, Keller captures Harriet's transformation from impressionable to self-respecting, her voice gaining dimension as she discovers Emma's plans of manipulation.

Waltz choreography (Eliana Seven Merritt) elevates the elegant society, sweeping partner turns, gentle hand placements, and synchronized footwork, creating party images reminiscent of Regency-era grace. Each dance visually reinforces emotion and relationship, transitioning from platonic to romantic as dips are shared between unexpected matches.

Costumes (LBHS Costume Team) interpret Emma's social status beautifully, centering her dresses around simple floral beauty. Her white, pearly dress adorned with pink embroidery contrasts with Mrs. Weston's (Sam O' Neill) glittering green gown, expressing their mother-daughterly dynamic.

Refined and heartfelt, Laguna Beach's Emma waltzes through romance and realization, proving that love flourishes not through force, but through sincerity.