



This image released by Bleeker Street shows Freida Pinto, (left), and Zawe Ashton in a scene from 'Mr. Malcolm's List.' (AP)

Film

A story of love, friendship and revenge

Austen-era schemes fill 'Mr. Malcolm's List'

By Jocelyn Noveck

"It is a truth universally acknowledged," goes one of the more famous opening lines in English literature, "that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

That's Jane Austen, beginning her 1813 "Pride and Prejudice." Austen herself has nothing to do with "Mr. Malcolm's List," the clever, entertaining and delectably pretty new film starring Freida Pinto - but also everything. It's our collective thirst for such Regency-era "comedies of manners," examining the intense matchmaking activity of a certain level of British society, that has given rise to this, to TV's "Bridgerton," to the 2020 "Emma" adaptation with Anya Taylor-Joy, and other films too numerous to name.

Of course, you might ask, at a time of such turbulence in the world, what do 19th century upper-class romantic machinations have to do with, well, anything? To which we say: Whatever! Bring it on. Distract us with your lovely frocks flowing straight from the bosom, your exquisite bonnets with feathers, your real-estate porn in the countryside and your smart dinner-table repartee. We could do a lot worse.

There's one key element in which "Mr. Malcolm's List," a story of love, friendship and revenge served on a porcelain plate, diverges from previous Regency-era comedies (but aligns with "Bridgerton"): its diverse casting. Director Emma Holly Jones, working from a script (and novel) by Suzanne Allain, has said she was inspired by Broadway's "Hamilton," in which American history's famous characters are portrayed by a non-white cast.

Here, the cast is led by British-Nigerian actor Sopé Dirisu as the titular Mr. Malcolm, Zawe Ashton as the scheming Julia, and Pinto

as the noble Selina, who serves as a reluctant pawn in this triangular tale. All three are excellent, but Ashton is particularly mesmerizing - to be fair, she gets the meatiest role by far, and it's always better to play complicated than noble (though sometimes Julia veers dangerously into the downright mean). Supporting roles are ably filled, especially by an appealing Oliver Jackson-Cohen in the best-friend role as Julia's cousin, and a ridiculously dashing Theo James as, well, a ridiculously dashing captain.

But let's talk marriage, shall we? Because marriage is the only goal here - and everyone knows it, even the child versions of Julia and Selina, whom we meet at boarding school in a brief prelude. Selina, the daughter of a country vicar, notes that she has little means to offer an eventual husband. Julia, ever the pragmatist, promises she will find Selina a mate - once her own marriage has been secured.

Marriage

Sixteen years later, we're in 1818 London and Julia's on the hunt. She manages to wangle a date with wealthy Jeremy Malcolm, the town's most eligible bachelor. But at the opera, he tests her knowledge. She knows nothing about opera, nor can she answer his question about the Corn Laws. He yawns, a development noticed across the theater in a box, where other young ladies snipe that after four unsuccessful "seasons" in the marriage market, Julia really should step aside.

Things really get bad for Julia when an unflattering comic sketch, or caricature, circulates in the press - a sort of Regency-era social media diss - showing her being spurned by Jeremy. "I am ruined," she laments. She consults her cousin Cassidy, who's friends with

Jeremy and lets on that the wealthy bachelor has an actual list of qualifications for an eventual bride.

Ever more humiliated, Julia hatches a plan: She will groom a willing candidate to fit all Jeremy's qualifications, and then, once he's ready to propose, give the snobbish man a taste of his own medicine.

Enter Selina, who's beautiful and intelligent if not wealthy. Julia brings her for an extended stay in London. Reluctantly, Selina agrees to the scheme, but soon discovers Jeremy is not the insufferable snob Julia has described. In fact, he's a sweet and thoughtful man, justifiably wary of fortune-hungry schemers (rather like Julia).

So what's a poor vicar's daughter to do? Clearly, as the couple slowly falls in love, there will be tears and missed signals and misunderstandings.

There will also be walks in pristine gardens, cups of tea consumed in exquisitely appointed sitting rooms, parties and dancing. Also, a costume ball! Once we hear that, we know there's going to be an identity mix-up of vast proportions - and very nice garments.

But in an Austenesque world, matches are ultimately made, of course. Nobody is left out - everybody gets a spouse, as Oprah might say! Even the amusingly dry footman (Divian Ladwa) finds his match, as we learn in an ending credits sequence well worth sitting through.

It's almost enough to make you forget that in the 21st century, getting married isn't the panacea that's presented here. But no matter. This is 1818, and it's certainly relaxing to visit a time when things WERE so simple - at least, in screenplays. How calming to spend two hours absolutely knowing, to paraphrase an English writer of a different era, that all will be well that ends well. (AP)

Held under stc's CSR program for the National Camera Day

stc organizes professional photography workshop

AlJasem: We participated in the National Camera Day to empower those who wish to pursue their passion in photography



Danah Al-Jasem

Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, organized a professional photography workshop moderated by Abdulrahman Al Bedah and in collaboration with H&S Store. The workshop, held on the National Camera Day, was organized under the umbrella of stc's corporate social responsibility (CSR) program.

The photography workshop, led by Al Bedah, provided attendees with valuable insights and tips on how to capture professional photos. The demonstrations and explanations provided by Al Bedah aimed to empower the aspiring photographers attending the workshop to improve their photography skills using the advanced features and technology available in both modern digital cameras and smartphones.

stc indicated in a statement that

the photography workshop was organized by stc's Corporate Communications Department as a platform to support individuals wanting to learn more about the art of photography. stc had previously held several photography workshops in the past that received positive feedback and high turnout from attendees. In an effort to continue encouraging individuals to participate in such workshops and follow their true passion, all participants were presented with certificates and received special gifts from H&S store, at the end of the workshop.

Commenting on the workshop, Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "The high number of registrations we continue to receive from holding photography workshops reflects the demand for such workshops in the community, especially amongst the younger generation who are always eager to learn more about the latest technological trends. This year



we participated in the National Camera Day to empower those who wish to pursue their passion in photography or elevate their professional skills, keeping in mind that most small and medium sized businesses lean towards digital marketing and being active on social media."

AlJasem added, "As part of the core values behind our CSR framework, that revolves around

health, education, preserving environment, youth empowerment and entrepreneurship, we continuously search for innovative ways to engage and empower members of our community.

She added, "As a leading pioneer in digital transformation within the telecommunications sector in Kuwait, stc has organized numerous initiatives in collaboration with entities within



the government and private sectors. Moving forward stc aims to explore similar initiatives that are guided through educational platforms by strengthening its relationships with various entities to create a larger impact within the community."

AlJasem concluded, "On behalf of stc, I would like to thank Abdulrahman Al Bedah for moderating the workshop and providing our attendees with

valuable tips, as well as H&S Store for their support and collaborative efforts."

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