

Molly: Hey, everyone. Before we begin today, we want to thank our newest patron, Kyle. Welcome to the team. Now, as you know, Becca is reading *Persuasion* for the first time in preparation for Season 4, and we're going to be releasing her initial reactions on Patreon alongside each episode. That's going to be available at our \$15 tier. So, if that sounds good to you, head on over to patreon.com/podandprejudice to see how you can support us. And now, enjoy this week's episode, the penultimate episode of Season 3, talking about *Emma Approved* with Emma herself, Joanna Sotomura.

[Pod and Prejudice theme]

Becca: This is Becca.

Molly: This is Molly.

Becca: We are here to talk about Jane Austen.

Molly: We are here specifically to talk about—

Molly and Becca: *Emma Approved*.

Molly: -again.

Becca: And I think the last *Emma* of the season.

Molly: Oh, yeah. Our last *Emma* episode of the season. That's insane. We've been talking about *Emma* for two years. [00:01:00]

Becca: It's a long book. It's got a lot of adaptations. So, we have a lot to go through. But listeners, if you're new here, I, Becca, I have read many Jane Austen novels, watched many movies and watched the Jane Austen YouTube content that is the subject of this podcast right now.

Molly: And I, Molly, am doing all of that for the first time through this podcast.

Becca: If you want to hear Molly read through *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility* for the first time, you can listen to Seasons 1 and 2 of this podcast, respectively. But that is what we're doing here today.

Molly: No. Today, we are talking about *Emma Approved*. This is our second time talking about *Emma Approved* on this podcast. If you want to hear us talk about the writing aspects of it and everything, you can check out our episode with Bernie Su. But today, we are joined by Emma herself, Joanna Sotomura.

Hello. Welcome. Thank you so much for joining us.

Joanna: Hello. Thank you so much for having me. [chuckles]. This is so exciting.

Becca: Oh, this is such a pleasure for us. We're both big fans of your work, [00:02:00] and we're fangirling a little bit on our side of the country, just having a good time. But why don't you tell the listeners a little bit about you and *Emma Approved*, as they've gotten a sense from our prior coverage? But give it to us from your perspective.

Joanna: Sure. Hi, everyone. My name is Joanna Sotomura. I had the honor of playing Emma Woodhouse in the web series, *Emma Approved*, that came out a decade ago. And *Emma Approved* is a modern vlog style adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma*. So, yeah. So, it's filled with all kinds of fun things and 2013 nostalgia.

Molly: Yes, definitely the 2013 nostalgia.

Becca: I was informed by listeners of the pod that I am too early to call Tumblr dead. But every time I watch the *LBD* and *Emma Approved* content, it reminds me of my days as a Tumblr girly, both in like [00:03:00] fandom, and also in like that being where I picked out my outfits like, where Emma was posting, basically. [chuckles]

Joanna: Oh, man, Tumblr was such a fun. God, it feels like a time capsule. Yeah, it was the place that I would go to right after an episode aired to look at all the fan art for *Emma* and just geek out myself. So, not RIP Tumblr, but the memories.

Becca: Apparently, the youth are on it again and doing all sorts of fun stuff with fandom and fanfiction again. So, it is alive. Back alive now in 2024.

Joanna: Oh, my gosh. It's vintage.

Molly: Yes.

Joanna: Vintage internet.

Becca: Exactly. [laughs]

Molly: In life, you're an actor. Is that correct? Is that what you are still doing?

Joanna: Oh, yes. I am an actress. I live in Los Angeles, California. I just finished an incredible project that was shot in Japan for six months, and got back last year and had [00:04:00] a baby. So, I guess I'm an actress/mom.

Molly: Congratulations.

Joanna: Thank you. Yeah, it was wild. It was the biggest thing I ever done career wise and I guess life wise. [Molly giggles] So, it's been a crazy two years. Yeah.

Becca: Oh, congratulations.

Joanna: Thank you.

Becca: I mean, Japan is incredible, but motherhood-

Joanna: Oh, yeah.

Becca: -just all around. [chuckles] So, speaking of mothers, Jane Austen, the mother of literature.

[laughter]

Joanna: Nice. Yes, nice segue. I love it.

Becca: Yes. I'm famous for incredible segues on this podcast. [Molly laughs] No one has any notes ever.
[laughter]

Becca: So, whenever we have a new guest on the podcast, we always like to ask a few questions about their relationship to Jane Austen, starting with, what is your relationship to Jane Austen?

Joanna: So, I feel like Molly thrown into a Becca world. When I first got cast as Emma, that's when I saw that there was an entire Jane Austen planet that I had no idea existed [00:05:00]

prior to the series. And so, I tried to do my homework very fast, and just realized how deep and rich this fandom was. So, yeah, I got just thrown into it via *Emma Approved*.

Becca: My heart did a little flutter when you said you were a Molly in a Becca world.

[laughter]

Becca: Love us as analogies for that. [Becca laughs] So, since joining the Austen fandom, what is your favorite piece of Austen content?

Joanna: Okay. I love this question, because *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved*, because I'm incredibly biased. And then I was thinking of what adaptations I like. I hope the Zoom is working, because I have to show you guys this, and I know you can't see it on the podcast, so I will describe it. But can you see this at all?

Molly: [gasps] I love those.

Joanna: So, it is like little Ms. Austen, like my first Jane Austen book. And Dayeanne, who plays Harriet in our series, actually gifted this to my daughter. And [00:06:00] it's just so cute. So, I'm sure there was like a much more sophisticated answer, but I was like, "I can't not say Emma like emotion book." So, it's like, "Emma is excited." And then you're going to-- Hold on, this is my favorite one. Harriet is sad.

[laughter]

Joanna: Isn't that funny? And then like--

Molly: Oh, my God, I'm obsessed.

Joanna: Yeah, Mr. Woodhouse is bored.

Molly: Oh, my God.

Joanna: Mr. Elton is angry. Yeah, so it's all the characters. And then Mr. Knightley is love.

Molly: Wow.

Joanna: It's just so cute. It was the fact that like, Dayeanne bought this for me, who's my sweet Harriet just makes me want to get so teary, because she's one of my dear friends to this day. And this just is like the most incredible thing. It doesn't get any better than little Ms. Austen.

Becca: Oh, man. That warmed my heart [Joanna laughs] so hard right there, because-- Oh, we've had a lot of answers to this question, and we have seen a couple Austen picture books, but they just-- getting the youth involved in [00:07:00] enjoying Austen work, even at such a young age, is so special. Especially, having Harriet gifted to Emma's daughter is like particularly special. That's just lovely. So, that is in the pantheon for my favorite answers to that question right now. So, oh, that just made my night.

Joanna: Oh, my gosh, I'm honored. I'll tell my daughter. She's three months, but I'll let her know.

Molly: Aww.

Becca: So, I'm sure she'll be like, "Yeah, yeah, I know. I'm very popular already." [chuckles]

Molly: I'm an inspiration.

Joanna: Yeah. And then she'll spit up on herself.

Molly: Yeah.

Joanna: As she's won to do.

Becca: Who among us hasn't?

[laughter]

Becca: So, question number three is, which Austen character do you relate to the most? And if it's Emma, because that's who you played, that's totally great. [chuckles]

Joanna: Well, it's funny, because in the beginning of filming *Emma* and shooting this, getting to know her in the world of Austen, I was like, "I'm nothing like Emma." I care a lot about my friends so much that I want to get involved more. I love just gossip and hearing. [00:08:00] I love fashion and material things. And then I started realizing like, "Oh. [Molly laughs] Oh, no, the similarities are quite obvious."

I think Bernie actually called me out on that too and he's like, "What are you talking about? You're exactly like your character." And I was like, "Ah, sure. I'll take it," which made her so easy to play. But yeah, it's hands down. It's Emma Woodhouse still to this day. I honestly wouldn't have it any other way, which is I guess, very honest or very Emma answer to say.

Becca: Honestly, the most Emma part of that answer was starting with, I'm nothing like Emma, because there's a genuine plot line where she's like, "I am nothing like Mrs. Elton or in this case, Caroline Lee.

Joanna: Yeah, exactly.

Becca: It's like, it's so Emma.

[laughter]

Molly: To be fair also, Bernie's response was Emma/Frank Churchill for himself. So, there you go.

Joanna: Oh, totally. He said that for me from day one. Like, "I like this character so much because I am this character." [Molly giggles] [00:09:00] And as an actor talking to your show creator, you're like, "Oh, that's not intimidating."

[laughter]

Joanna: Great. Well, I hope I do you/Austen proud. Geez.

Molly: [laughs] Yeah, no pressure.

Becca: So, final question in our Austen portion of the conversation is, what's your hottest Austen take? So, for example, one big one we get is like, Lydia is a tragic, misunderstood figure in her time. But it can be whatever hot take you have from Austen.

Joanna: Yeah, it's just that Emma's a philanthropist and just a true everyman, I think. Actually, so, I say that jokingly, but if you really think about it-- I think you guys touched about this in your Bernie podcast, and I was like, "Ah, kind of stole my answer." But she is a part of a little bit of all of us that's just a little louder and more outspoken and brasher than society would allow us to be right now. But I don't know, [00:10:00] I adore her.

And then another Austen just general hot take, which I guess is like summed up in your guys podcast, is that she's a really, really fun author that everyone can relate to and get in touch with. And she's incredibly accessible. Sometimes like an intimidation with reading any kind of literature that's just been around for so long and has such a staunch fan base, because you feel like you might not understand it or it will go above your head. But when you actually get into it and you read it, you're like, "Oh, my gosh, this is so relatable to my friend group now, to my crush that I hate, but I think I like." [Molly giggles] It's an incredibly accessible author. So, yeah, those are my little Austen takes.

Molly: I cannot agree more.

Joanna: [laughs]

Becca: It's funny, I had a friend recently tell me she was like trying to get into reading more classics this year, and she started on Jane Austen, and she was like, "I'm finding it really dense to get through *Pride and Prejudice*. Do you have any suggestions?" And I was like, "Well, do I have a podcast for you to [00:11:00] listen to-

[laughter]

Becca: -as you read along?" So, she's reading through *Pride and Prejudice* with our podcast, and she's like, "Oh, okay, I'm getting it. It's fun." [laughs]

Joanna: Well, that's so wonderful too. And the thing that I realized with shooting *Emma Approved*, and again, being thrown into the Jane Austen world was like, people want to share. They want you to get excited about Jane Austen too. There's really no from what I've had the fortune of seeing gatekeeping. It's more of a community that wants to just talk about what characters you relate to, and this tense love affair or any of her other fun subjects. But yeah, it's been a really, really cool world to get to be a part of for these past 10 years.

Molly: Yeah. The Jane Austen fandom I've found coming in similarly to you with no experience in it is a very open, accepting community compared to some other fandoms, because Becca and I are both huge nerds, [00:12:00] and so we're in other fandoms as well. There are some fandoms that I'm a part of, for example, no hate to the *Star Wars* fandom, but [Joanna chuckles] I am a huge *Star Wars* fan, but they are very gatekeepy and I don't like that part of them, and I'm like, "I just want to have a good time." I think that's what a lot of Jane Austen fans are like, "If you're just here to have a good time, good. Come, watch the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*, Have fun with us." Like, "You don't have to be into historical costuming. But if you are, that's awesome and we welcome you." So, I love that. I love that response.

Becca: Yeah. We have a lot of friends in the podcasty world, and they do a lot of the same content we do in different areas, different literature areas. We are, I think, so lucky by comparison, because our fans are so sweet to us. We don't get hate mail. We don't get insults. When we get something wrong, they gently correct us. It's the nicest community to be a part of, and our fans are just [00:13:00] very, very open to welcoming new people. So, it makes for a great fandom I think personally. [chuckles]

Joanna: Oh, completely. We had the pleasure of going to a lot of the different conventions back. Remember when those were like super-hot in like the mid-2010s? Maybe they still are, I don't know, but like-- [crosstalk]

Becca: PodCon, VidCon. [chuckles]

Joanna: Yeah, exactly. And going to those and just seeing the art that's created for the Jane Austen everything and just the kindness that they had too, because following the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was very scary, which I'm sure we can get into later too. But just seeing the

kindness that came along and the warm welcome that came with *Emma Approved* was just something you don't really see every day with follow up series. So, it's very lucky.

Molly: That's actually a great segue to our first question [00:14:00] about *Emma Approved*, which is-- [crosstalk]

Becca: It's not as good as my segue, but whatever.

[laughter]

Molly: It's not as good as Becca's segue, but-- [giggles] So, how did you first get involved with *Emma Approved*? What was that process like? Were you already a fan of *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*? Yeah, just tell us about that.

Joanna: Sure. So, I got an audition for a new web series that was following a very successful series. But they didn't really tell me what it was, so I couldn't do that much research, which being the person that I am helps because I tend to get incredibly in my head and talk myself out of a lot of things.

So, I got the audition with some dummy sites with just sites from some other thing. And I don't follow instructions very well, as you saw with setting up my system here. [Molly laughs] So, I didn't read that it was like the lead of this series. I was just like, "What a fun little character to just throw away [00:15:00] and go to my next audition and go to my day job and woo-hoo?" [00:15:00] And then I guess I did really well. I guess that was pretty Emma E, Emma energy. [laughs]

Bernie and the rest of the producers liked me and they brought me in for the callbacks. They gave me the actual real sides for Emma. I saw it was the lead and I was like, "Oh, no."

[laughter]

Joanna: "Oh, the pressure." But again, I was like, "I'll just have fun and throw it away. And if they like me, they like me. If they don't, they don't." But I like me, which I, again is, I guess is very Emma. And did great in the audition and booked the part pretty soon after that. And then I got to read with a lot of the other actors and do chemistry reads with them, which was so exciting, because when people walked in the room, you're like, "Oh, that's Harriet. Oh, that's Mister Knightley." Like, "Oh, easy." So, that was really wonderful.

I think Bernie saw me in another series that I did before [00:16:00] called *Video Game High School*. I guess that character had some Emma energy too, so he brought me in for *Emma Approved*, and that was-- Yeah, that was pretty life changing. That was so special. That was one of the best auditions I've ever had.

Becca: Were you the first cast in the series too?

Joanna: Yes, I was. I was.

[laughter]

Joanna: I was the first cast in the series. And then I read with like-- Oh, I forget how many Knightleys, which is really incredible, because they all were so different. And actually, James Brent Isaacs came in to read as a Knightley 2, and his audition was fantastic. But yeah, he was much better in the role that he ended up looking. And Dayeanne was another one. She walked in as Harriet and we're like, "Oh, her instantly."

Becca: Oh, she gives off perfect doe eyed fawn walking through the forest in a perfect Harriet way.

Joanna: Oh. And that's exactly how she entered the room too. She was just such a sweetheart and so much fun to work [00:17:00] with. All of the cast was almost exactly their character and just so much fun to banter with. And even though we couldn't really go off script, because Bernie wanted to obviously stick with the Austen literature and story beats, behind the scenes was just like a giggle fest. So, yeah, that's how I got involved.

Oh, and he also-- After I booked it, Bernie brought me in to be like, "Hey, I just want to let you know this is following this big show called the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*," to which I said, "Cool. What's that?" And he was like, "Okay."

Molly: [laughs]

Joanna: So, he showed me some stuff and was like, "You know, it was a big thing and it's going to be hard to follow that. Oh, hold on, I'm getting a phone call. Oh, wow, we just won an Emmy."

Molly: Oh, my God.

Joanna: I'm sitting there like, again, as someone that tries to be like, "Hey, you deserve to be in the room. You deserve this. I like me, so who cares who else likes me?" In that moment, I was like, "Oh, no."

[laughter]

Joanna: [00:18:00] That's great for them. Then that's wonderful and I'm so happy. But like, "Oh, buddy." I'm the lead of the show that has to follow that, "Cool, let's go." So, that was a fun day.

Molly: Oh, my God. That's like fun and cool and so stressful.

Joanna: Yes, it was.

Becca: I'm picturing out like being in the room with Bernie when he found out they won the Emmy.

Joanna: Oh, yeah, that was great. He handled it too. He was like, "Oh, wow." Like, "Would you look at that?" [chuckles] Whereas I think most people would just be screaming and jumping up and down. I think he was very much like, "That's incredible." And meanwhile, I'm just slowly melting into my three-inch heels.

Molly: [giggles]

Becca: Oh, really quick tangent here. One of the things that I noticed about *Emma Approved* upon re-watch 10 years later is how many women are wearing heels. Like, we are just not wearing stilettos the way we used to. I wore [00:19:00] heels constantly in 2014, and I was watching and I was like, "I used to do that a lot."

Joanna: Oh, yeah. I think part of us after the pandemic, we were like, "Oh, flat surfaces with flat feet? This is amazing. [laughs] Mobility? Wow." Because I very much am the same too. When I look back at some of the *Emma* fashion, I'm like, "That was really fun." I don't know that I could wear that again, especially if in an office setting. [chuckles]

Molly: This isn't a question we have written down, but Emma wore a different-- There's not a single outfit repeating moment in the entire series. I guess that makes sense, because she's a fashion blogger. But that was very impressive to me.

Joanna: Thank you. Our costume designer, Jessica Snyder, was amazing. She pulled really, really fun looks. I actually really think I developed my sense of style from doing *Emma*

because we would [00:20:00] do-- we would get the scripts that week, we would do a fitting on Friday, we would shoot Saturday, Sunday and then the episodes would come out pretty shortly afterwards.

So, the Friday before was just like chunky necklaces, skirts, stilettos, different hairstyle choices. Like, it was just so much fun while you're trying to frantically memorize 75 pages to film the next day. Yeah, it was a fun, fun ride.

Molly: Wow.

Becca: So, talk about, I guess, the process of filming vlog as opposed to TV or other mediums, what the process of filming *Emma Approved* was like.

Joanna: Oh, sure. So, the hardest thing about filming vlog style was just being friends with staring down the barrel of this lens and pretending that that's the audience that I'm talking to, [00:21:00] the video diary that I want to leave as my legacy versus being able to just strictly interact with the other actors and forget that the camera was there. So, that was a little tricky in the beginning. And then it got so easy that it was hard to not stare down the parallel lines on anything else that I filmed for a good while after that.

Yeah, so we would get the scripts. One time we got it a day before we shot. These were chunky, big old episodes with mostly my dialogue and a little secret. So, we would actually have music stands underneath the cameras with our scripts there. And sometimes I could look down and pick up a line. There was one series of episodes where they gave us the script. I don't know why it was delayed, but they gave us a script the day before, and this one was a big boy. This is like 85 pages. In my mind, it felt like 150 pages. But it was like 85 pages. [00:22:00] I had to memorize it. I had a few hours, and then were filming Saturday, Sunday.

So, there's one chunk of episodes where Emma's really pensively looking away a lot, [Molly laughs] and that's because I was desperately trying to find my lines. I won't say which one, but if you hunt around, you can probably pretty quickly be like, "Oh." But I would just like you know, talk to the camera, talk to my costar and then just have to take a beat.

[laughter]

Joanna: Like, find it. That was a really fun trick. So, yeah, that was great. And then filming it was just so much fun. One of my favorite things to watch are the bloopers for *Emma Approved*, because it was just a fun, light hearted set. But we worked really, really hard. But when we laughed, we laughed really, really hard. And then after we would film the episodes, we would go outside and shoot all of her [00:23:00] lookbooks for the Tumblr, which was fun.

We filmed, and we shot all in like the same location. So, we tried to make like, this wall look like New York, whatever. [Molly giggles] And then turn around, and this wall is the beach, and like this like-- So, we did a lot with very limited resources. I credit a lot of that to Bernie Su and his just crazy, brilliant, creative mind.

Molly: Oh, I love that. I was just thinking back to the costumes for a second. I'm remembering from our interview with Ashley Clements, who played Lizzie in the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. She mentioned that for *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, all of those clothes were their own clothes. Like, they had to bring in their own costumes. I'm thinking about the glow up between *LBD* and *Emma Approved* and how now you guys have a costume designer and you have different walls for different sets for the lookbooks. It's pretty cool.

Joanna: Yeah, we were super, super lucky. That was a [00:24:00] huge part of Emma's character was to be able to be a true fashionista. And at the time, if they did use my clothing, she wouldn't have been as impactful,-

[laughter]

Joanna: -I'd say. Her Tumblr would have been pretty sparse. [Molly laughs] So, we were very, very lucky to get just all kinds of different looks. And Emma, for the time too, she did weird things, like some weird blazers with different necklaces and dresses layered with this pattern that I wouldn't think worked, but it does because she's Emma. So, that was so much fun.

Oh, also, I'm so excited now too, because I haven't really thought about this stuff for so long that it's all flooding back, and I'm like, "And another thing." So, because we filmed five episodes a day roughly, we would have to change, do quick makeup changes, run back in, quick hair changes. Yeah, every outfit, every [00:25:00] hairstyle was coordinated and planned, so that we could just execute fast for the two days that we had to film a month, which was just something my little 25-year-old body was happy to do. [Molly giggles] Now I'm tired.

Becca: Oh, yes. [Joanna chuckles] This came out when I was 20 years old, I think. I recall watching it. Watching it back, there's something so beautiful about it because the clothes that Emma's wearing are so bold and so sheek for very specifically 2014.

Joanna: Yes.

Becca: And I get the sense of nostalgia for feeling so connected to that fashion, whereas like nowadays, I'm so grumpy about certain things that are in style nowadays. But I was watching this and I was like, "Oh, yes, I really connected to this era of style." [laughs] And Emma is an encapsulation of that.

Joanna: Oh, my gosh, that's such a funny point. No, such a great point too, because that was the era of [00:26:00] sock buns and chunky statement necklaces with peplum tops. It was very specific. I think nowadays, sometimes it's like low rise jeans with your crop top, and you're like, "No, [Molly laughs] Don't know." [laughs]

Molly: Oh, my gosh, I saw a meme that was a picture of someone's dress at the Oscars. I don't remember whose-- There was like a couple of different peplum dresses at the Oscars, and I was like, "Millennials are triggered right now."

[laughter]

Joanna: Yes. Oh, my gosh, yes. Or, you walk into a store and you see slouchy boots or something else, and you're just like, "I thought that died."

Molly: Yeah?

Joanna: Hello, old friend.

Becca: One of the things that's come back recently, it's subtle, but it's been a very fight or flight moment for me every time I see it, is that when 2014 was around, and you see it in *Emma Approved*, it was very much about a thin heel with a pointy toe, [00:27:00] like a narrow toe. Not a comfortable shoe, but very stylish in my brain. And now, it's not only that I like the chunky heels, it's much nicer on my foot, it's a good situation, but the square like toe to a boot is back.

Joanna: No.

Becca: I don't know what to do with that. I don't know how to process it.

Joanna: It is?

Becca: Yeah.

Joanna: Fashion gasp. [Molly laughs] I thought that one was dead. I thought that one was real dead. Wow.

Molly: Wow. It just goes to show how little I know about fashion and trends. I middle parted my hair recently. I got my hair cut with a middle part and everything to fit in with the youths. And as you can see, I already un-middle parted it. Oops. [Molly giggles]

Becca: I actually was sitting there admiring Emma's massive side part like, "Ah, that era." You pulled it off beautifully. [laughs]

Joanna: Oh, thank you. Oh, and speaking of Emma hair-- Okay. Going back [00:28:00] to not realizing how strong the Lizzie Bennet fan base was and that they would probably want to watch *Emma Approved*, since it was this thing following, I didn't think to get my hair colored all one color. I had a really weird dye job and I just was like, "It's a web series. I don't know, I'll just keep this." [Becca laughs] And then the one thing that I saw was that everyone's like, "That hair? [Molly laughs] What is up with that hair?" And then you'll notice the next chunk of episodes, Emma's hair is looking a lot better. But I was like, "Oh, people care, and people care a lot about this series."

I hear your notes, and I'm not going to take it personally, and I'm going to go buy a box of Clairol and dye my hair, because damn, that was crazy.

Molly: Oh, my God. I'm just in such shock because I literally-- There was at some point, I never thought that your hair looked bad, like it always looked good. I turned to my girlfriend, and I was like, "Her hair is a different color in this episode than it was in the last episode." She was like, "No, it's not." And I was like, "Yes, it is, I swear. I'm 100% sure." But we were on a time crunch, so we couldn't go back and check. [Molly giggles]

Joanna: Oh, [00:29:00] I can confirm. Yes, it was. And that was because there was also speaking of style trends, in that time, I got weird ombre hairstyle where it's just dark to blonde. I did that and then I thought, "I don't know, there's no excuse. There's no excuse." But yeah, the first eight episodes, Emma's hair is a little different. And then the next eight episodes, it's really good.

Molly: It's so funny. I think that that ombre look is also back by the way. But-

Becca: It is.

Joanna: No.

Molly: -we can [giggles] move on from the trends that are back.

Becca: It's called Bronde now, as in brown and blonde.

Joanna: What?

Molly: What?

Joanna: So, they're just renaming things? Sure. Okay. Sure.

Becca: I would say, we've gotten off topic on the fashion, but there's nothing more Emma Woodhouse than getting off topic on fashion. So, [Joanna chuckles] this was a beautiful tangent. Going back to our questions, what was your favorite episode or episode arc is also an acceptable way to talk about it?

Joanna: Oh, wow. I loved [00:30:00] the whole Maddy Bates Box Hill fiasco in both the book and in our series, because it was just the first time I think I really got to flex as an actor, like the real Emma part muscle and the real mistake that she made and realizing the impact that had not only Maddy Bates, but then with her relationship with Alex Knightley. So, that was really fun and heartbreaking to shoot.

And then the episode following with Harriet trying to lift Emma up, and give her the bear, and the ice cream, and I got to just wear sweats and cry and just be broken was really fun and a relief after playing such a bubbly, high, confident character for the better part of a year. That was really fun.

And then, of course, if I love [unintelligible 00:30:52] be able to talk about it more, the episode 70, *The Kiss*.

Becca: Oh.

Joanna: Yeah, that was so much fun, and filming that one I [00:31:00] asked Brent and Bernie actually, yeah, "I couldn't see the flowers. I wanted to see them for the first time in real time when we filmed them, so I could have a real reaction." So, that was a real reaction to seeing these beautiful flowers for the first time from Knightley. That one was just really touching to shoot.

And then my other one that just put a sweet bow on the whole experience was the crane one with where Harriet's just, yeah, trying to pull in the cranes and they all fall. We all made cranes.

Molly: Oh, my gosh.

Joanna: Yeah.

Becca: We were talking about this with the Bernie on his episode. He was so precise about this, and designating *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as a sitcom and designating *Emma Approved* as a romcom. I think part of the reason that plays so well is that as a cast, you guys had so much chemistry. You talking about how well everyone got along backstage and how warm a set it was really translates on screen, [00:32:00] because the story lives and dies by how much you care about these relationships. And you guys do such a good job making people care that it's a really great buildup and payoff.

I will say on the Maddy Bates thing as well, you had a moment that always gets my heart when I watch it where Knightley's leaving the room and you beg him to stay, and the camera cuts off. I remember being like, "Oh, it's real now." Like, "This is sad."

Joanna: Aww. Well, thank you so much. The chemistry with everybody was just something that I don't think I've ever recreated in any of the sets or shoots that I've been on since. Every single person working on that show was so passionate about what we were creating and had no ego and was just fun and down to play. I'm happy that that translated. I really am.

And then that scene that you're talking about too, where Knightley's leaving, and I'm like, [00:33:00] "Please don't go." There's a couple of takes where Brent flubbed a line and someone's like, "Oh, wait, we'll take that back." And I'm like, "No, I was right about to cry."

Becca: [laughs]

Joanna: So, even that scene shooting something that like heartbreaking and sincere was still fun, because it was still just us at the end of the day playing in that romcom. When I heard Bernie say that too in your last episode, I was like, "Oh, that makes total sense. That's exactly that. Lizzie being a sitcom and Emma being a romantic comedy." It was so special. I

recently watched a few episodes too, just to remember it all and was like, "I feel like I'm right back on set and I still feel that magic." So, I'm glad it translates. I really am.

Molly: It really does. So, Emma is such a juicy character, and we've talked about this a little bit. You relate to her. She is a flawed woman with a heart of gold, [Joanna giggles] and we love her. So, what did you find most challenging about playing her, and also what was the most fun?

Joanna: Yeah, that's a great question. So, touching on [00:34:00] what I talked about fortune with the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, it was hard to follow that show and be cast as a character that you know is unlikable in the beginning. Like, she's not Lizzie and she's not instantly attractive as a character. She's kind of selfish and brash and arrogant, but still charming. So, that was a hard line to play and be true and honest with that character and not seek the audience's approval, because I wanted them to like our show following Lizzie Bennet. So, I had to just get rid of all of that and just play what the amazing writers had adapted for us.

They made it so easy and they made Emma so clear. All I had to do was add me to it, which, again, I guess is just my own spin on Emma Woodhouse. And that created the magic that we call *Emma Approved*. So, it was, yeah--

The fun part about [00:35:00] playing her too was, yeah, just leaning into that side of you that's just kind of like, "Well, I really don't think you should wear those shoes because they don't exude confidence," like something that you wouldn't normally say in a polite social setting. And so, being able to lean into that kind of energy was just awesome, that unapologetic energy. So, yeah.

Becca: So, that does lead in-- You were following up *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and you were following up Lizzie Bennet, who's obviously iconic, but you're also following up another iconic Emma Woodhouse made for the modern era. You had the pleasure of playing off of Alicia Silverstone's Cher Horowitz in *Clueless*.

Joanna: Ooh.

Becca: How did you differentiate yourself? Because your Emma is so distinct from hers, despite being a lot closer in time frame to that Emma Woodhouse than say the 1810s Emma Woodhouse. So, what did you do to separate yourself from Cher?

Joanna: Oh, well, thank you so much. I think one of my biggest [00:36:00] fears was people thinking that I was going to try to do a version of Cher Horowitz, who is a legend, who is a beautiful Beverly Hills golden goddess. And *Clueless* is fantastic and untouchable. And so, the best part of that was just not touching it. Like, I didn't want any part of my Emma to resemble hers at all. So, I just love let her go.

I didn't rewatch it, I didn't worry about it. The only thing I was a little bit worried about was like, they're both fashionistas living in the modern times. But then that was it. I honestly just let Bernie take the reins and let the writers do their thing and just focused on that, and then that led to *Emma Approved*. So, I'm actually happy that I didn't sit and think about that and worry about that as much as I probably should have.

Becca: Oh, I think your Emma is very different than Cher, and in a great way. I'm thinking about it now, this is like occurring to me as we're talking about this, but Cher's a teenager. She's a precocious teen.

Joanna: [00:37:00] Mm.

Becca: And your Emma of *Emma Approved* is a woman in her mid-20s already having built herself up in business and is trying to like take over the world through PR and influencing.

Joanna: Mm-hmm.

Molly: Yeah. Also, your Emma and Knightley are not related-

Joanna: Oh, yeah. [chuckles]

Molly: -by marriage, which is a great plus.

Becca: So, Molly hadn't seen that movie. When we watched it for the first time, she's like, "He's her brother."

Joanna: Yeah. In the beginning, you're like, "They're not going to fall in love, are they?" And then by the end, you're like, "But look, they're so sweet together," and then you forget the whole flirting with incest thing. But yeah, it was-- [chuckles] Yeah. I can't believe you've never seen *Clueless* before. That must have been so much fun.

Molly: Oh, my gosh, it was so much fun. I love that movie, but I did not forget about the incest part. I am finding it very hard to differentiate. But oh my gosh, just quick side [00:38:00] tangent. I don't know if you're aware of this, but KT Tunstall and Amy Heckerling have collaborated on writing a *Clueless* musical that just premiered in London.

Joanna: [gasps]

Molly: Yes. I can't wait for that to come to Broadway, because I will watch the heck out of that.

Joanna: That's fantastic. Oh, wow, that's exciting.

Molly: Yeah. So, we saw that there was an *Emma Approved* revival in 2018. Now I haven't watched it, because I clicked on it, and I saw something about Anne Elliott, and I was like, "That feels like it's going to have spoilers for something that I haven't read yet," Jane Austen wise. But I'm curious if going back four years after the original or five years after the original *Emma Approved* brought you any new perspectives on playing Emma or how that was different without spoilers. And Becca looks like she has something to say about it.

Becca: Yeah. Just as a caveat, Molly has not read or consumed anything having to do with *Persuasion*.

Joanna: Oh, okay.

Becca: So, we're keeping her spoiler free on that story. [laughs]

Joanna: Oh, okay. Good to know. [00:39:00] Yeah, going back and revisiting *Emma*, it was fun again, just to work with Bernie and Brent and Dayeanne. It was different, because we obviously strayed away from the original *Emma*, and we're trying to do a new thing and do it mockumentary style instead of vlog style. It was great. I do really, really like the episodes that we did, but there's just something about the version that we created *Emma Approved* that I think is just really, really special. I think it was nice to put a bow on it and to see where the characters are now. But I think leaving it where it's at is, where I think it should be. [chuckles] Yeah.

Becca: That's very fair. I will say I loved revisiting the series, like 10 years down the line. I'm sure as now you've revisited it with us. What would you say about the format of telling this story through YouTube, like as both a time capsule of 2014 [00:40:00] and also, what are your reflections on that form of storytelling in 2024?

Joanna: Yeah. I think it was so funny too, because at the time, it just seemed like the thing to do because vlogs were starting to get very popular. There were some certain vloggers that were just let you into their entire life. It was so fascinating to watch their day to day. And so, for Emma to do that just seemed perfect, especially since she was someone that wanted to leave her legacy behind. And vlogs will never go out of style.

Yeah. So, it's really sweet watching it back, because like we talked about with the fashion and with everything else, it was like, "Wow, that moment in time, that 2010s to 2016," it just has a really special place in my heart, a little Tumblr place in my heart.

Becca: What you're making me think of a little bit is like, Jane Austen wrote *Emma* as one of those perfect first encapsulations of first person narration and the unreliable narrator for a story. There's something so perfect about the vlog format [00:41:00] for telling that kind of story, particularly how it was done in the 2010s. Yeah.

Joanna: Yeah, because you can edit it exactly like how you want people to see you. You can give yourself, yeah, the good edit, someone else, the villain edit.

Becca: And you can just spit all your thoughts about everybody into a camera, and then you capture Emma's inner monologue [chuckles] through most of just Jane Austen. But I guess my thought was reflecting on it 10 years later, do you have any meditations on telling this story in this fashion?

Joanna: Yeah, I think exactly to what you were saying, I think it's very much catered to how Emma sees herself and how she wants to be portrayed to the world, so she can spew all of her thoughts and her plans of global domination to the world. I think nowadays too, I think people have a tendency to be very honest and open in a vulnerable way that I don't think we were as comfortable with back in the day. I think now there's [00:42:00] acceptance to just really wearing your heart on your sleeve and not editing as much. Maybe that's just where I am at now, 10 years as a new mommy with a baby who's trying to be more in her space and more vulnerable. So, yeah, that's a very long-winded answer to, I think, a question I don't even know that I really answered. [chuckles] Sorry.

Molly: I think you totally did.

Becca: It was perfect.

Molly: Yeah. *Emma Approved*, it's such a polished, or it starts out at least as such a polished thing that she's trying to do, like, she's documenting the best parts of herself.

Joanna: Yeah.

Molly: Well, the good, the bad, and the ugly. But she really wants to get across that this is something she's good at, and this is what she's doing. It's funny, because when you were talking about your favorite episodes, you talked about the ones where Emma has fallen and made mistakes and is in her sweatpants crying and eating ice cream, because [00:43:00] [Joanna chuckles] that's when you start as an audience at least to see her as human and see her as relatable, and you're like, "Oh, she's flawed. She's just like me," and that's where she really starts to become the lovable person that we know.

Joanna: Yeah.

Becca: I think that's a pretty nice place to end what has been a two-year long celebration of the book, *Emma* by Jane Austen for us. That's the end of our Season 3. Joanna, I cannot think of a better guest to end Season 3 of our podcast on. Thank you so much for joining. Do you want to tell the people where they can find you?

Joanna: Well, congratulations on two years of *Emma* and your podcast. It's such a wonderful idea and such a creative podcast. I'm just more than honored to be a guest on it. So, thank you guys so much for having me.

Molly: Thank you.

Joanna: Yeah, my pleasure. Yeah, and everyone, you can find me on Instagram and TikTok @joannasotomura, and I will be on a new TV show [00:44:00] coming out this year called *Sunny* on Apple TV, 08:24 on Apple TV. So, be on the lookout for that. It's starring myself and Rashida Jones and a slew of just incredible Japanese talent.

Molly: Oh, my gosh.

Joanna: Yeah.

Molly: That's amazing. I can't wait to watch.

Becca: I absolutely will be watching that.

Joanna: Thank you so much. It's wildly different from *Emma Approved*, but it has a lot of similarities. So, I hope you all like it.

Becca: Okay. I'm so happy. I'm so excited for that. Okay, listeners, for next time and for the next few weeks, we'll be releasing a little bit of bonus content and then we might be taking a brief, very brief hiatus.

Molly: Like one week. Don't panic, everybody. [giggles]

Becca: We're going to come back. I just need to finish *Persuasion*. [chuckles]

Molly: And I need to go on vacation. [giggles]

Becca: Yes. So, we haven't taken a break. In the four and a half years, we've been doing the podcast, so we're just taking a little baby one. But we have some content coming your way first. So, get ready for all of that, [00:45:00] listeners. And until next time, stay proper-

Joanna: And always wink to the camera.

Molly and Becca: Yes.

Becca: Let's all do a little wink. [Molly laughs] It's an audio medium, but I don't care. [laughs]

Molly: We'll add a little wink sound effect.

[sound effect]

Molly: Thanks, Graham.

Molly: Perfect.

[music]

Molly: Pod and Prejudice is edited by Molly Burdick and audio produced by Graham Cook. Our show art is designed by Torrance Browne. Our show is transcribed by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription. For transcripts and to learn more about our team, check out our website at podandprejudice.com. To keep up with the show, you can follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, @podandprejudice. If you love what you hear, check out our

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