

Legally Blonde

Date

Wednesday 29th May 2019

Company

The Wranglers Theatre Company

Venue

The Muse Theatre, Lipson Cooperative Academy

Type of Production

Musical

Director

Wendy Holmes, assisted by Carly Salisbury

Musical Director

Gavin Martin

Choreographer

Wendy Holmes and Ricky-Lee White

Report

For those like me who had never seen the film or the stage show 'Legally Blonde', this musical is an all singing, all dancing romantic comedy which sees pink princess Elle Woods go from Home Coming Queen to Harvard Law Student all in the name of love. In her bid to be taken seriously Elle tries to abandon her dizzy blonde image until she realizes being true to herself might be the way for her happy ending and fulfil her potential. Unusually, the moral message of this musical is strong and admirable – much to my surprise!

Georgia Parnell grew on me as Elle with a good singing voice, her comedic timing and characterization allowing her to excel in the lead role. There was really good support from the 'Greek Chorus' of Elle's friends. The girls in this show really worked well together.

Jennie Farmer especially stood out, with her infectious energy and beaming smile throughout. Claire Field as Brooke Wyndham was on top form too – her performance of ‘Whipped into Shape’ was very impressive. Completing the very strong core of girls at the centre of this story were Megan Priest as Enid and Taryn Fay as Margot – both were excellent.

Emmett Forrest, the nerdy studious law scholar who helps Elle on her road to success was played by Ronan Couling and he gave us a relaxed, likeable character. I really warmed to him.

Julie Farmer created the loveable, kooky character of Paulette, the unlucky in love beautician, until she found love with the U.P.S delivery guy played brilliantly by Matthew Day - their partnership worked very well, especially in the Irish Jig scene. Both are natural comic actors, with a lot of charisma, which the audience loved.

The suave Warner Huntington III was played by Jack Higman. I really enjoyed his first scene with Elle when they sang their duet together. Not an easy role to play, as he’s quite dry, but this was a confident performance.

Kerry Hore, who is always excellent, nicely captured both Vivienne's initial frostiness and eventual thawing as the girlfriend of Warner. Jonathan Clarke was suitably sleazy as Professor Callahan, the ruthless law tutor offering female interns a leg up to the career ladder in return for ‘favours’. His patter song in Act One was an impressive tour de force.

The supporting cast worked extremely hard and there were two very special canine performers in the form of Bruiser and Rufus who gained immediate popularity from the audience the moment they stepped or were carried on stage!

Director Wendy Holmes never let the pace sag from the raucous infectious opening number to the exciting, rousing finale. The choreography was generally impactful, if a little repetitive at times.

A small but well-controlled band, conducted by Gavin Martin, good lighting by Alan Porter, and a simple but effective set from Geoff Coventry and John Little, enhanced the whole experience. I felt the orchestra was too loud at times and the cast had to shout over it occasionally. Also, if you are using mics then everyone needs them – in one scene there was someone with a mic in conversation with someone without a mic, which was odd. Budgets can dictate these issues, of course, but I always believe the sound quality should be a priority in a musical.

Costuming was very good – it is always a strength for this company – so well done to Sue McLoughlin, Angie Wilson and Emma Skedgel. Props were authentic and effectively used. The set was quite minimalist, which is understandable for a show with big dance numbers – however, I do tend to predict the general set format for Wranglers shows now, so maybe a different approach might be an idea for next season.

Overall this musical is really uplifting and a feel-good show that can't help putting a smile on your face whilst communicating a strong moral. It was a pleasure getting to know this show from scratch, so thank you Wranglers for introducing it to me.

Well done to the Wranglers for another very enjoyable summer musical and I look forward to December for your 2019 panto, Aladdin!

I must close by paying tribute to Paula Moore, who very sadly died this year. She was always very helpful and efficient when I was booking my tickets to see the Wranglers shows in recent years and I offer my condolences to her family, friends and everyone at the Wranglers Theatre Company.

Gareth Davies

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