

## **Arts a la Mode Review** **by Tim Baxter-Ferguson**

### **LEGALLY BLONDE**

Music and Lyrics by Laurence O’Keefe and Nell Benjamin

Book by Heather Hach (based on the novel by Amanda Brown and  
The Metro Goldwyn-Mayer Motion Picture)

Directed and Choreographed by Jerry Mitchell

North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center

Ovens Auditorium

April 21-26, 2009

I imagine that those who are first introduced to the idea that Legally Blonde the movie starring Reese Witherspoon as a sorority girl who pursues the love of her life all the way to Harvard law school has been transformed into a Broadway musical might react the same way I did—with horror and despair. At first glance it would seem that whatever Broadway used to be, a Legally Blonde musical would surely be an omen of darker times. But, instead, Legally Blonde is a bright, funny, touching, whimsical, American musical. Like Guys and Dolls or Kiss Me, Kate, Legally Blonde is an expertly crafted collection of show stopping number after show stopping number. The audience openly cheered on several occasions when I attended, and it was clear that a good time was had by all.

I had the pleasure of attending Legally Blonde in New York when it had first opened, and the tour does (as it must) scale down and alter some of the magnificent set pieces, but it is no worse for it. The heart of the musical is the comedy and the music; neither of these were affected in the least by the elimination of a set or two. Sorority president Elle Woods is jilted by her perfect boyfriend, Warren Huntington III. He feels he must start acting more seriously when he goes to Harvard and needs to date someone who is “less of a Marilyn, and more of a Jackie.” Elle takes this to heart and decides, despite having no previous interest at all, to get into law school, too, to prove her love for Warren. Of course, once she is accepted, Elle slowly realizes there is more to life than she first thought.

Becky Gulsvig is a wonderful Elle Woods. The part demands a true triple threat—an actor who can sing, dance, and act—and Gulsvig does all very well. A particularly long number where she pleads her case to be admitted to Harvard is perhaps the most impressive as she belts and dances for several minutes and then must sing a short ballad. D.B. Bonds as the nerdy Emmet Forrest is also quite good.

Crowd favorites included Ven Daniel as the UPS delivery man, Kyle, and his lady love, Paulette (played with brash humor by Natalie Joy Johnson). Both steal the show and received enormous applause during their curtain call.

What works best in this musical is that each song moves the plot along yet each song is a gem and stands alone. In addition to this, it has one of the smartest and funniest books in

recent Broadway memory. So, regardless of what you might first think, don't be turned off by Legally Blonde's source material. This is a legitimate musical comedy and one of the most enjoyable evenings at the theatre you're likely to have any time soon.

**Review by Tim Baxter-Ferguson**

Tim Baxter-Ferguson is an associate professor of Theatre at Limestone College and Chair of that program. He is a resident playwright at Theatre Charlotte and has had his plays produced throughout the United States and Canada.