



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

NAME OF COMPANY: Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society (YAOS)
NAME OF PRODUCTION: Legally Blonde
VENUE: Octagon Theatre
DATE: 14th October 2022
ADJUDICATOR: Laura Corradi Loughran

Legally Blonde originally opened on Broadway in 2007 to mixed reviews, with the New York Times calling it a 'nonstop sugar rush of a show', with high-energy, empty-calories, which approximates the experience of eating a jumbo box of Gummi Bears in one sitting. And, 'unless you're used to such a diet, you wind up feeling jittery, glazed and determined to swear off sweets for a least a month.' Luckily, I have a sweet tooth, and it appears that your audience were in agreement with me. Your production was full of energy (perhaps lifted by the red bull), highly entertaining and oozed sweetness with charming performances across the board. The enthusiasm and passion that every cast member had for this production was infectious and clear to see, and perhaps worth a cavity or two. Congratulations.

ACT ONE:

The staging throughout the production was slick and well-conceived, strongly supported by the fantastic set and scenery by UK Productions. Even pre-show the stilettos and mobile phones across the proscenium arch set the tone for the flourish of pink that was about to dazzle us. **Omigod**, opened the production with energy, strong

soloists, bright costumes, and seamless stage management and direction. From having one sorority member scoot across the stage, to the candles, the introduction of Bruiser, slick set change into the boutique with equally slick dress change, it was a treat that immediately set the tone for a fun-filled evening.

The date scene was a great integration between sincerity and comedy, with Warner's warm vocal and simplistic staging during **Serious**, enhanced by the ensembles character action, Elle's crying and the comedic blocking of the violinist and waiter. **Daughters of delta nu** was sung well and was a good set up into the extravaganza of a number that is **What You Want**. Here you showcased, once again, seamless direction and set changes, good scene work, and excellent choreography to the capabilities of the full company, incorporating the cheerleading and marching band. A fantastic number!

The Harvard Variations was a great introduction to the students, with each soloist having clearly defined characters both vocally and physically. Elle's entrance with Bruiser was particularly effective with great use of colour contrast in costume and props. Professor Callaghan's entrance was confident and assured, and **Blood in the water** showcased Callahan's great voice and natural flair ruling and commanding the stage with ease. This is another number which was well supported by the ensemble, with slick execution of the choreography.

The set of the Hair Affair Salon was once again a visual treat and the instant connection between Elle and Paulette well founded. **Ireland** was beautifully sung with great story telling, and I especially enjoyed the visual of the Irish flag and green spot during the reprise.

The Party scene, with the infamous Playboy bunny costume was reminiscent of the movie, with excellent collective mocking and sniggering by the ensemble. **Serious reprise**, clearly depicted Elle's hope of a chance of rekindling her relationship with Warner, whilst he remained unimpressed with her efforts, if not her looks.

Chip On My Shoulder was another tour de force of a sequence, with stunning vocals. Emmett radiated charm with excellent comic timing, and his attraction to Elle was clear as he taught and tested Elle, and brought her a present at Christmas (the reindeer ears were a nice addition). The Greek chorus worked well interspersed throughout and I particularly enjoyed Elle's display of confidence as she won her argument in the classroom, and later at Dewy's Trailer. A special mention to Rufus here who was instantly adored by the audience and was handled well by the actors.

The first section of **So Much Better** was sung with heart and sincerity by Elle, leading into another dazzling spectacle to end the act. Fabulous energy, Elle in lights, the ensemble turning to reveal the hoodies in perfect timing, and Elle's excellent belt to finish, ending in thunderous audience applause.

ACT TWO:

Act 2 opened strong with the introduction of fitness fanatic Brooke and her workout video. **Whipped into shape** was an excellent showcase of vocal and physical stamina with the skipping routine that I am sure took much rehearsal time to perfect, and perfect it you did. The scene at the jail highlighted further differences between Elle and her fellow students between the selfish and the selfless and those with and those without integrity, culminating in a sweet energetic scene between Elle and Brooke.

Relationships started to blossom in this next section, in equally, perhaps sickly-sweet ways (the New York Times may have had a point), however the charm and comedy in both the writing and performances allowed the audience to get on board with both partnerships. Elle and Emmett at the department store was well staged, with the workers, perfume spritzer, and shoppers bringing the scene to life. Emmett expressed well vocally when behind the screen during **Take it like a man**, and seeing Elle size up her 'new man' side by side was quite simply, adorable. Back at Paulette's Salon we witnessed another match made moment with the arrival of the UPS courier, who delivered his scene work incorporating audience participation with expertise. The direction between him and Paulette was excellent and I particularly enjoyed the perfect timing of the final turn and smile at the end. **Bend and Snap**, provided great vocals by the soloists, more perfectly in sync choreography, and allowed Paulette to find her self-confidence...until she knocked over Mr. UPS!

The Courtroom was well setup with the judge's bench and stenographer, which each new character having a clear personality and purpose. **Gay or European** showcased excellent storytelling, with Carlos displaying excellent facial expressions to great comic effect. The dance off was fabulous, flamboyant and stylistically fun with the lift and spin a great comical addition.

After all that frivolity, we were due a change of pace, and Elle and Callahan excelled in illustrating their acting range during the forced kiss and subsequent slap. Upon Callahan's exit we witnessed the sincerity of Emmett and the vulnerability of Elle with a stunning rendition of **Legally Blonde**, truly beautiful and memorable in its simplicity and stand out vocal performance. Of course, the glitz and glam doesn't stay absent for long, and it's only a small moment before a new sparkly pink suit is on display, not forgetting the Irish dance breakout, choreographed into the synonymous Riverdance lineup featuring a lord of the dance pose. Towards the end of the sequence the exchange from Brooke where she decides that Elle should represent her was a little lost, perhaps it could have been brought to downstage centre, or have a stronger lighting focus to illuminate it amongst the busy throng.

After a tentative start, Elle grew in confidence in the courtroom, whilst Chutney gave a superbly defensive characterization. The replay scene in the bathroom (**Omigod**) with the Judge on the toilet and the stenographer writing on toilet roll allowed for a tittering of laughter in the audience, culminating in a final victory for Elle.

The final graduation scene was heartwarming and I particularly enjoyed Paulette's' round up of where everyone was now. The final number **Find My Way**, was again beautifully sung and it was a joy to see this enthusiastic company of performers come together for one last time.

A truly superb show – Congratulations to you all!

MUSIC AND SOUND:

The sound was well balanced for the majority of the production. On occasion, for example during **So Much Better**, the soloists were difficult to be heard over the ensemble. For the most part however, the sound was unobtrusive and at its best. The orchestra was under excellent direction, as were the cast. Dynamic range and cut-offs were expertly managed, making for a slick and polished performance. The Orchestra were a highlight of the production also, and the sound balance in the instrumentation well executed. The vocals by the soloists and ensemble were effortless, with **Omigod** and **Positive** harmonies particularly well done.

DESIGN: UK Productions Ltd scenery and costumes

The set fit the stage well and the staging utilized the levels and space well. The scene changes were navigated beautifully especially during the sequences with multiple changes (**Omigod** and **Chip on my shoulder** in particular), a testament to not only the design, but the execution by the stage management team, direction and performer. Detail – mobile & shoe on proscenium arch. The swift changes from the exterior and interiors of the Delta Nu House, the dress boutique and the Harvard yard, Elle's room and Callahan's classroom was a spectacle in itself. The lighting enhanced the set and the action, adding to the colourful glitz and highlighting themes such as the end of **Ireland** with the green spot. The costumes were fantastic, in particular Elle's iconic bunny, and sparkly pink suit, the cheerleader and marching band uniforms and the colour contrast enhancing the characters personalities.

CAST

Elle Wood played by Louise Cannon

You showed true command as a leading lady. Vocally strong with a secure belt, you were able to perform with confidence and fantastic breath control, especially following the **What you want** dance break. **Legally Blonde** was a highlight, showcasing your beautiful voice along with sincere and sensitive acting choices. The journey Elle went through was portrayed well (although you possibly came across a little too intellectually apt at the beginning) and your relationship with Emmett and friendship with Paulette was particularly enchanting. You captured her tentative ambitions perfectly and performed with true heart. You have an excellent stage presence and you made Elle Woods your own. Congratulations.

Emmett Forrest played by Carl Holdway-Bradley

Utterly delightful! Your relationship and feelings towards Elle were a joy to watch. You performed with sensitivity and a vulnerability which was compelling, and we were rooting for you from start to finish. Vocally secure with a warm tone, both **Chip on my shoulder** and **Take it like a man**, were show highlights. You have a natural charm, which worked well in the role. A solid performance. Well done.

Paulette played by Jennifer Holland-Brewer

I think you enjoyed playing this role! You have an excellent flair for comic timing, and utilized your voice to add humour whilst delivering a flawless performance. You have a strong stage presence and a warmth which is thoroughly engaging. **Ireland** was sung beautifully showcasing your vocal ability as well as the art of selling a story through song. An accomplished performance. Well Done.

Warner played by Harrison Waterhouse

A strong secure performance, oozing smugness! I enjoyed your confident performance of **Serious**, and you delivered the comic outcome of the song well. You played the contrast between what you thought was right, in marrying Vivienne, to what you perhaps desired in Elle, well for a young performer. Good work.

Vivienne Kensington played by Amber Wilson

You captured the role of Vivienne well and showed a true change of heart, from utter disdain towards Elle, to embracing true sisterhood. I particularly enjoyed your self-satisfaction when getting Elle in trouble and tricking her into adorning fancy dress. You have a strong stage presence and I enjoyed your vocal work. Well Done.

Professor Callahan played by Edward Creswick

You captured his authority well, and entered the stage with an air of confidence and charisma. **Blood in the water**, captured your ability to effortlessly command the stage, whilst displaying good vocal ability. Your characterization reminded me a little of Hugh Laurie in House, likeable, though perfectly adept at being cruel to get what you want as necessary. Excellent work.

The whole company performed brilliantly. A minor note, I would have liked to have seen a fuller cast list in the program, noting which ensemble member played the minor roles as many were stand out moments, especially the UPS guy, Carlos and Chutney. Special mention also to Khaleesi and Igor, playing Bruiser and Rufus, and to those in the cast that interacted and handled them. A truly entertaining, (sugar filled) evening. Congratulations!

Thank you for your warm welcome and your hospitality and I look forward to many more performances at this theatre.