

Legally Blonde @ The Muny

Music and Lyrics by Nell Benjamin and Laurence O'Keefe

Book by Heather Hach

Based on the novel by Amanda Brown and the MGM film

Ran July 25 - August 1, 2022 @ The Muny

Published August 23, 2022

In terms of audience numbers, *Legally Blonde* is the most popular production the Muny has put out this season, thanks in no small part to this story: when the Muny was accepting video auditions for their season, dancers had to send in a video performing a dance combination from *Legally Blonde*. The dancers posted the videos online and were then blessed by the algorithm gods of Musical Theatre TikTok. The videos became monster hits, bringing in millions of views, thousands of videos that turned the combination into an actual TikTok dance, and just as many announcements on social media pages the world over that they were going to make the pilgrimage to see the Muny's *Legally Blonde*. Truthfully, all this exposure the Muny has been getting is invaluable. Even with historic flooding that canceled a performance, as well as technical difficulties resulting from the heavy rain, these audience members who otherwise wouldn't have come to the Muny have gotten the chance to see a very, very fun, high-energy show that, more than any production I have seen this season, truly utilized and took advantage of everything that makes the Muny a great venue.

The story: Elle Woods has just graduated from UCLA with a 4.0 GPA and a Bachelor's in Fashion Merchandising, all while serving as the President of the Delta Nu sorority house. However, despite all of her accomplishments, Elle is seen by others as nothing more than a "dumb blonde," purely because of her unabashed femininity and acumen for fashion and luxury. On the night Elle hopes that her boyfriend, Warner Huntington III, is going to propose, he instead breaks up with her, saying that he needs a relationship with someone more "serious" if he is going to attend Harvard Law. Elle is rightfully furious with Warner – so much so that she decides to prove him wrong, that she is "serious." She joins Warner in applying to Harvard Law and, much to the surprise of her friends, family, and peers, gets accepted. Once she starts attending, a pretty obvious culture clash happens between the overtly formal atmosphere at Harvard and Elle's Valley Girl style and sensibilities. But as time goes on, Elle once again surprises everyone by applying herself and working her ass off to prove herself to Warner. In the end, Elle gains the confidence to realize that she doesn't need Warner to be happy – that she, in fact, has the knowledge and skills that make for a great lawyer.

This production never has a single dull moment. I do give a lot of credit to the energetic and imaginative staging of director Maggie Burrows and the choreography by William Carlos Angulo, but this show is carried on the shoulders of Kyla Stone as Elle. Under Stone's portrayal, Elle's intelligence and inner strength are present right from the beginning, and the rest is utter glee. Stone looks like she is having the time of her life up there on the massive Muny stage. Fergie L. Phillippe plays Emmett Forrest, Elle's socially awkward tutor, and their scenes together are

really charming, bringing strong romantic chemistry to the stage. Patti Murin delivers some excellent vocals and physical comedy as Paulette Buonufonte, Elle's kind but insecure beautician. Sean Allan Krill is appropriately creepy as the show's villain, the cutthroat Professor Callahan, who just sees Elle as a pretty face to be used for his needs. He would make for a great Discord mod. Hayley Podschun leads a fun Act Two opener as Brooke Wyndham, a fitness guru who becomes the defendant for Elle's first trial. Kelsey Anne Brown, Gabi Campo, and Khailah Johnson get some great laughs as Delta Nu sorority sisters Margot, Serena, and Pilar, who serve as Elle's personal "Greek chorus" (because "Greek life." Hey, it's funny.). Rounding out the main cast are Dan Tracy as the pompous Warner and Olivia Kaufmann as Vivienne Kensington, Warner's new girlfriend who starts out as a snob but slowly comes around to realizing Elle's potential. There's also some "d'aww"-inspiring work from two adorable stage dogs: Ricky as Bruiser, Elle's chihuahua, and Myrtle as Rufus, Paulette's bulldog; both animals were excellently trained by William Berloni. Everyone, including the ensemble, is capably conducted by musical director Lon Hoyt and the fabulous Muny Orchestra.

The production design is also fully realized; Tim Mackabee's scenic design features several fun surprises, such as a full-sized swimming pool. Leon Dobkowski's costumes fit remarkably, not just on the characters but the story as well. What pushed me over the moon, however, was Kylee Lorra's video design, where there are two really creative (and crucial) uses of live video. Also impressive are Rob Denton's lights, Liz Printz's hair and makeup, and John Shivers and David Patridge's sound.

I'm so happy that the Muny's *Legally Blonde* got as viral as it did. This is a very big-hearted, very energizing show about what it means to realize your potential; this a story that is so meaningful to the musical theatre kids who learned about this production through TikTok. I hope those kids come back to see another Muny show – it's an institution that deserves to be visited at least once in someone's life. I consider myself one lucky son of a gun to live in a city that loves musicals as much as me.