



**Megan Simón as
Elle Woods**

Gemini Vegetarians Rule in ACE's *Legally Blonde*

I don't know exactly how many blondes it takes to screw in a light bulb, but I suspect the number is more than one and something less than 163. Honestly, the questions isn't all that interesting, the punch line probably less so, but since we're on the subject, let's dispense with any misogynistic concerns and acknowledge that *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, like the movie upon which it's (egad) based, has pro-feminist pretensions, if only of the lipstick variety. So please, let's not go getting our panties in a bunch; the whole thing is pretty harmless. After all, Actors Cabaret – where the show runs through June 2 – is all about fun, atmosphere and community.

Measured by any standard, then, *Legally Blonde* indubitably qualifies as an unrepentant piece of theatrical fluff, and as such, its success should depend entirely on the answer to this single inquiry: Is ACE's production fluffy enough? To which I say: yes and no. Staged under the zippy direction of the talented Joe Zingo, *Legally Blonde* offers up just enough percolating burble and referential nostalgia to satisfy fans of the silver-screen original, and just enough independence and individuality to justify its existence.

Heather Hach's book is a hash, and best viewed as a mere perforation of the movie – a sort of greatest hits about a seemingly ditzzy but actually quite shrewd valley girl who, with pluck and perk, pursues her Harvard-bound sweetheart by getting into the law school. Where, of course, OMG LOL, by just being BFFs with her own quirky self, she wins the day.

As everyone's fave femi-floozy Elle Woods, Megan Simón brings a courageous slant to a role popularly owned – lock, stock and apparel – by Hollywood ass-kicker Reese Witherspoon. Simón, who is lanky and athletic-looking, not only gives us a different take on Elle, but she dispenses wholesale with what Reese wrought. She possesses the title role, so much so that it isn't until the second act that you come to appreciate the subtlety of her performance – a combination of bemused half-innocence and uptalky charm that channels the resilient comic goof of Lucille Ball by way of Kristen Wiig.

The production is a bit uneven, yet buoyant and funny enough to be worthwhile. Many of the problems reside in the musical itself, a hybridized, sloppy-seconds crowd-pleaser with only moderately successful music and lyrics. Hand it to Zingo and his cast, who more often than not locate the necessary effervescence to make *Legally Blonde* percolate.

A number of strong performances further hoist the fun factor: As the proudly part-Irish hairdresser Paulette, Michelle Sellers brings down the house; Megan Robertson is spot-on as the aerobicizing accused murderer Brooke Wyndam; and Mark VanBeever, in the dual roles of Grand Master Chad/Carlos, again proves his strong comic chops, and serves as the production's choreographer. – *Rick Levin*

Legally Blonde: The Musical plays through June 2 at Actors Cabaret of Eugene; info & tickets at ActorsCabaret.org or 683-4368.

Pleasant Hill Opens Door to *Little Shop of Horrors*

Just like the herbaceous monstrosity at the heart of this campy musical romp, the cult appeal of *Little Shop of Horrors* just keeps on growing. But if you've merely seen the movie starring Steve Martin and Rick Moranis, you only know half the story.

Director John Muellner says the play – running through May 13 at Pleasant Hill Community Theatre – is “totally different” from the movie. “There's a surprise ending,” Muellner says, “and as a result the audience is not going to expect what they usually have seen in the film.”

The Pleasant Hill Community Theatre stage is tiny and intimate, but Muellner's set optimizes the space through engineering and design. “After certain scenes, the set opens up,” he says, “and all of a sudden there's the dentist office.”

Alan Menken, best known for his Academy Award-winning scores for many Disney productions, composed the plays 17 musical numbers, an upbeat mix sung by “doo-woppers” rhyming “little shop” with “bop-she-bop.” “There's more music than dialogue,” says Muellner, though his cast shines too.

The script calls for only six characters, though Muellner packs in 18 altogether. His choreographer is Al Villanueva, Churchill High School's drama director. The leading lady, Chiffon, is played by Sage Davis, a junior in high school and already an experienced performer. Flower shop owner Mr. Mushnik is played by Don Aday, a veteran of Fred Crafts' “Radio Redux” shows. The dentist is played as an “evil Elvis” by Chris Nordquist, who recently performed in the Very Little Theatre's production of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.

Grammar school kids play street urchins, and also help as puppeteers. The chorus is equally stellar. One of the singers, Serena Violet, is a student of local performer Siri Vik. Performing the music are professional musicians who play in rock bands hailing from Sacramento to Washington. “I'm proud that we have such a talented group of people,” Muellner says. – *Vanessa Salvia*

Little Shop of Horrors plays May 4-13 at Pleasant Hill Community Theatre, 35575-1/2 Zephyr Way, Pleasant Hill; for times & tickets, visit phct.org or call 541-988-1195.

Spring Inspirations Bloom at LCC

What if Lady Macbeth and Richard III met in hell? What if a high schooler planned a bank heist? Or what if longtime Lane Community College professor Patrick Torelle were trying really hard retire, and the one-act plays he helped students craft still needed staging?

The ten-minute play festival *Spring Inspirations* has been around for more than 15 years. In a nine-month process, Torelle teaches a playwriting class, then helps his students find directors and actors to stage their plays. It's an important rite of passage for LCC theatre students, but it's Torelle's baby.

Spring Inspirations actor-turned-producer Johnny Rodgers was in the midst of searching for lethal-looking props when I reached him by phone. “Well, it wouldn't be *Spring Inspirations* if we didn't have to find weapons,” Rodgers says with a laugh. Weapons? Apparently he has less than a week to find a bomb, two M16s and a shotgun.

But props are only a part of the process. Rodgers, along with former LCC Student Production Association members Michelle Nordella, Adam Leonard and Marla Norton, has worked tirelessly. They're reading and editing plays, dealing with casting issues and helping train directors, all in their attempt to “carry forward Patrick's original idea and continue to open doors for the many students (yet) to come,” he says.

Among cast and crew are a number of fresh faces. Rodgers notes that most of the directors are directing for only their first or second time. “The productions have an array of experienced actors and tech, and a collection of new student eager to sink their teeth into a show,” he explains.

And how are the shows shaping up? “I'm really excited to see all of them!” Rodgers says. “All of the directors have really impressed me.”

Spring Inspirations is always a mix of “intense drama to really out-there comedy,” Rodgers says. He promises a few more laughs over tears this year, noting “it is a great show with a variety of pieces encompassing a medley of emotions.”

I'm impressed by these graduates coming together to preserve a tradition. Rodgers humbly expresses the feelings of his alumni group: “We are only trying to carry the torch and keep the dream alive.” – *Anna Grace*

Spring Inspirations runs through May 12 at LCC; \$5 suggested donation or canned food for FOOD For Lane County.

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