



POWERFUL IN PINK

The indefatigable Elle triumphs in Cottage Theatre's lovable production of Legally Blonde

On yet another gray and wet Oregon night, the last thing my depression wanted was to be confronted by bubbly optimism.

But somehow I managed to break away from my preferred isolation, slipped on my tired rain boots and rowed on down to Cottage Theatre for opening night of *Legally Blonde*.

As a resident of Cottage Grove, I've only seen a couple of performances in the cozy building tucked behind the bowling alley, but both shows left me feeling grateful to

live right around the corner from such a creative space. *Legally Blonde* left me feeling no different.

In her directorial debut, Madison Baker takes on the ambitious task of putting up a big production on a relatively small stage. Packed with personality and enthusiasm, *Legally Blonde* is crazy fun for any audience. Baker utilizes the entire stage (and then some) to follow the incorrigibly blonde Elle Woods (Autumn Carter) from Malibu all the way to Harvard Law School in her attempt to prove to her ex that she is more than just a Marilyn.

Scene after scene provides a visual and musical high, determined to immerse you into Elle's cotton-candy journey and the power of sisterhood. Having a working knowledge of the original book, and having seen the Reese Witherspoon movie many gray and wet nights ago, it's now clear that *Legally Blonde* is organically meant for the stage.

Though the levels of the first two songs were a little off — let's be fair and chalk that up to opening night kinks — the stage was otherwise exploding with talent and energy. Carter, who is infuriatingly lovable as the gritty heroine in pink, is exhausting to watch in her refusal to take “no” for an answer.

While Elle is repeatedly told she isn't serious enough, it is her resilience and determination — along with the help of her equally bouncy Greek chorus of sorority sisters (Stephani Anderson, Jessika Skalin and Cassie Unger) — that reminds us all to believe in ourselves and, perhaps more important, to not take ourselves too seriously.

No one is safe from ridicule in this play. From valley girls and the Harvard elite to the drunken Irish, no stereotype is left unturned by a hilarious succession of musical numbers.

Other than the two adorable (albeit terrified) dogs on stage (Sasha Fierce and Jasper), it is Elle's trusted friend and hair stylist Paulette (Tracy Nygard) who steals the show. Nygard is a comedy powerhouse as Elle's “what if” future self. I have not heard an audience laugh like that, nor have I laughed so hard, since the last time the sun was out six months ago.

Granted, *Legally Blonde* is perhaps not all that weighty in philosophical or political rhetoric, but it is a refreshing break from the recent divisiveness, day in and day out. And that's not to say there isn't any meaning behind all that pink fluff.

Sexual harassment and the repeated undermining of Elle's character are the essential driving forces that bring Elle's unrelatable valley girl to human understanding. In fact, it is the unification of the passionate women of this show that brings harmony and color to an otherwise gray existence these days.

Legally Blonde continues at Cottage Theatre through April 29. Tickets are \$25, \$15 youth 18 and under, at cottage theatre.org.



THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Messy folks comingle in Opal Center's production of Good People

There are two kinds of people in the world: good people, and self-centered scum who don't bother to return their grocery carts. The Opal Center's production of David Lindsay-Abaire's Tony-winning play *Good People* features a cast of characters who straddle the line between good and cart-abandoning.

Director Eliza Roaring Springs and a tight-knit, all-female cast of very talented actors somehow managed to transform a quaint theater in downtown Cottage Grove into blue-collar Southie Boston. The story centers on a single mother, Margie (Tracy Ilene Miller), and her quest to find employment after she is fired from her dead-end dollar-store job. While the play explicitly deals with the frequently inescapable circumstances of an impoverished life, *Good People* asks us to consider the choices we make that can change the course of our lives.

The result is a tense comingling of messy humans. While Miller is great as the shit-stirring yet deeply sympathetic heroine, it is her interactions with her fellow Southies that really make this play worth seeing.

Especially colorful are the compulsively snacking and smacking Jean (Kim Fairbairn) and Margie's “lace curtain” of an ex, Mike (Elizabeth Peterson).

Good People is uncomfortable, funny and strangely optimistic despite its inherently tragic elements — not unlike the human spirit.

Good People runs through April 15 at Opal Center, 513 Main Street, Cottage Grove; info and tickets at opalcentercg.org. — Alexis DeFiglia