

Honors college

CityPulse Wed, 04-25-2012

by TOM HELMA



Michigan State University's sparkling 'Blonde' earns straight As

How does a musical that focuses on the stereotype of a blonde woman being a superficial airhead become a substantial piece of theater? In the case of Michigan State University's production of "Legally Blonde," simply by demonstrating the obvious: that while beauty might seem to be skin deep, intelligence is not.

Add a wide range of excellent performances to the nuanced texture of the script, and you have a potentially award-worthy show from director Rob Roznowski. Scenic designer G. Max Maxim creates a dazzling wall of fuchsia– lipstick red doors with pewter gold swirls that opens and closes at will to trigger a revolving Review peripheral stage that brings set pieces on and off the stage with minimal assistance from a running crew. Costume designer April Townsend clearly has the pulse of college clothing styles and dresses the sorority "girlies" and their fraternity counterparts with great accuracy.

Then there is the acting. Start at the top with the central character, Elle, (pronounced "L") Woods. Blonde and glamorous, to be sure, Elle (Erika Moul) turns out — duh — to have a mind of her own, and when she is rejected by boyfriend Warner Huntington III (Wes Haskell), Elle sings and dances her way into Harvard Law School.

Moul is brassy and bright, tender and tough, embracing the sartorial excesses of her character with abandon as she dazzles with an intuitive self-possessed stage presence. She belts it out, she evokes empathy and she is the heart of the story.

A supporting cast of characters and a snappy song and dance ensemble add to the richness of "Blonde." Haskell is crisp and snobby, while Christopher Robinson as Emmett Forest, the poor-boy law student from Boston, charms his way into Elle's heart and into the audience's heart as well. Who knew a person could sing with a spoton Boston accent?

Trish Amanda Hubbard, as workingclass Irish hair stylist, Paulette, comes close to stealing the show with her comic solos, while Landon Duyka, as the dour and almost sinister Professor Callahan, performs a tutorial on how the spoken word can be almost musical — with the assistance of a talented pit orchestra.

Three choreographers share the lime light for this production: Dionte Brown, Travis Staton- Marrero, and cos- tumer Townsend.

Both group numbers and individual dances are performed splendidly.

Two older gents were overheard at intermission discussing the question of whether a musical can have substance. Capturing the essence of the idea that we can never completely know the depth of one's intelligencenor one's inner beauty and then putting that insight to music, to song and dance adds up to something substantial.

Bravo.

'Legally Blonde'

Through April 29

Michigan State University Theatre

Pasant Theatre, Wharton Center 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 25 and Thursday, April 26; 8 p.m. Friday, April 27; 2 and 8 p.m.

Saturday, April 28; 2 p.m.

Sunday, April 29.

Pre-show talk with director Rob Roznowski at 1:15 p.m. Saturday, April 21; post-show talk on April 26 \$20; \$15 for students

www.whartoncenter.com (800) WHARTON

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