



NICK BRANNAM
DIRECTOR | CHOREOGRAPHER

PRODUCTION	<i>Legally Blonde The Musical</i>
COMPANY	Reading Operatic Society
PUBLISHED BY	Reading Chronicle
DATE OF PUBLICATION	20 th April 2017

It is early 2001 and fashion merchandising student Elle is taken to an expensive restaurant by her boyfriend, the Governor's son. As they dine expectations of a proposal, whipped up by her fiercely loyal sorority sisters, are cruelly dashed. The boyfriend severs ties, claiming she is not serious enough for his political ambitions while inadvertently sending Elle down a wonderfully silly path of self discovery and acceptance.

Kitchness, a love of absurd fashion and a generous, never nasty sense of humour lie at the centre of the film, and are qualities that the Reading Operatic Society has an abundance of in their adaptation at The Hexagon.

The play opens with the girls of Delta Nu high-kicking and scream giggling their way through an high-tempo number celebrating Elle's upcoming engagement.

"I got tears coming out of my nose. Mad props! He's the campus catch. You're a perfect match" best friend Margot (Charlotte Tait) sings, before leading the sorority into a rousing chorus of "Omigod, omigod, you guys!" The sheer spectacle and energy of this opening number regularly returns to the stage when the chorus jump into Elle's mind to offer internal fashion advice and dating tips. They are a well-drilled unit that break up the more serious parts of the show with welcome enthusiasm.

And then enters Elle, wearing a hot pink number and carrying her hand-bag sized dog Brutus. In the film she is played by Reese Witherspoon, whose sugary charm and comic timing had her nominated for a Golden Globe. On the Hexagon stage Laura Newborough offers a different but none-the-less enjoyable interpretation. Her voice is powerful and her movement across the stage determined. While Witherspoon is stuck in the mind's eye of all those who have seen the film, Newborough is a strong substitute, not placing a single false step.

The stand out performance however comes from Ryan Stevens and his interpretation of nice-boy-turned-heart throb, Emmett Forest. While Stevens does not quite have the lung capacity of Charley Woodward as salon worker/therapist Paulette Buonofounte, or the iron-faced foxiness of Fliss Bott as Elle's love rival Vivienne Kensington, he brings an unhurried, gentle charm to the stage.

In truth this production is not a subtle one and does have its weaker moments. The size of the ensemble and pace of dialogue had the sound technician at points unable to keep up. Some of the larger dance routines similarly came a little unstuck, particularly when skipping ropes were thrown into the mix.

But where it stumbled it did so under the weight of ambition. The costume changes were continuous, the sets convincing and sizeable and the upbeat score overplayed by vocal gusto. It also included a bull dog which received a spontaneous round of applause when it stumped across the stage.

Milo Boyd