



## [Legally Blonde](#)

at Z-Arts Theatre, Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) Feb 2017

If you were brave enough to go out last night with the tail end of Storm Doris still very much in evidence, and you happened to have been one of the lucky ticket holders to see Manchester Musical Youth's production of Legally Blonde at The Z-Arts Theatre in Manchester, then your journey was absolutely necessary and indeed totally worth it.

Producer **Dave Holden**, Director **Dan Jarvis**, and Musical Director **Kimberley Holden**, have taken the theatre maxim, never work with children and animals, and turned it completely on its head. I went last night, I have to admit, with a certain amount of trepidation. Despite being from a Musical Theatre background, it doesn't follow that one will like all Musicals; their styles, genre,

story, and even epoch all play an important part in whether or not I like a show.

I have never seen the film from which this Musical is based, and never seen the Musical before either. American High School teenie dumb blonde love story simply did NOT appeal! However, I have also learnt from last night's experience that I shouldn't simply 'give a dog (or show) a bad name'. Manchester Musical Youth have a reputation of excellence, and having already seen several of their shows, knew that whatever they did would be of the highest possible standard. But, how would they cope with something as frivolous and banal as this? I have seen only 'serious' Musicals from them in the past - Jekyll And Hyde / Les Miserables etc.

Well the answer is simple - they didn't just cope, they utterly smashed it and made it their own. With a storyline that had obviously been written on the back of a cereal packet by a bored 12 year old, the Musical follows the dumb-blonde rich-kid Elle as she follows her now ex-boyfriend into Harvard Law School, just to try and get him back, and ends up being the Valedictorian at her Graduation. This is something peculiar to North America I believe, but basically it means that she was the star pupil and so has the right to make a speech! Not only that, but in the process, realises that she didn't love her boyfriend after all and finds true love with a fellow student. Ahhhh!! Sappy, gooey, and absolutely not for me - until last night!

Where do I start in crediting the amazing talent that was on display? At the top obviously. **Pippa Greenhalgh**

totally embodied the role of  
*Elle Woods*

. If I ever see the Musical again, hers is now the definitive performance by which all others will be judged! Her lost love was played with a belligerent charm - a great oxymoron - by newcomer to MMY (although I loved him in Elf at Pendleton College at Christmastime)

**Zac Frieze**

; whilst the easy and relaxed style of

**Jack Gibson**

's

*Emmett*

, made for a lovely contrast. J

**ess Porter**

gave a very real portrayal of fellow law student and love rival

*Vivienne*

, and lesbian

*Enid*

was given a rather fun make-over by

**Em Kitson**

. The professor was played by

**Cameron Hall**

, looking and behaving every inch a man in his fifties. Quite remarkable when this is a youth company and so the oldest he could be is 25!

Hairdressing law student *Paulette* was played with rare relish, a huge sense of fun, and a dash of comedic brilliance by **Sarah Barron**, and completing the principal roles by starting the second act with a jailbird fitness routine was

**Emily Wilson**

as

*Brooke Wyndham*

This excellently chosen and very strong cast were supported by a group of nine 'cheerleaders' known as the Delta Nu. In this Musical they serve the same purpose as *The Ronettes* do in *Little Shop Of Horrors*

. They are all friends and cheerleading buddies of Elle from her old High School, but they appear and sing to fill-out the narrative and become the modern Greek Chorus for the show. They have a lot to do, indeed they open the whole Musical, with one,

**Caroline Featherstone**

having so much to sing and do in the opening number, I actually thought she was the lead until Elle appeared!

The others in this chorus-line were **Emily Snooke, Niamh Mulvihill, Tara Kitson, Emma Wilcox**, **Lucy Throburn**

, **Georgia Goulden**

, **Eve Rowan**

, and

**Annie Welsh**

. All were superb and despite acting as one all had their own individual personalities and characters.

And then there was a chorus of thousands! Well, 39 to be precise, but it looked a lot. Some of these took on small cameo roles too, of which two are worthy of a small special mention here I think. **Sam Bate's** totally hammed-up-for-all-it's-worth portrayal of delivery-man *Kyle* just made me laugh. I have seen Bate in a few things over the last couple of years or so, and he has a genius and innate sense of comedy timing. But the most surprising stand-out cameo for me came from diminutive

**Lucca Chadwick-Patel**

with his portrayal of

*Carlos*

. This character, which I imagine is almost insignificant and totally missable in most productions of this Musical was given a highly comedic and lovely lease of life here and it was both very funny and excellently played.

I mentioned animals at the top of this review. Indeed the show also 'starred' two dogs, Sizzles and Darcy who both were impeccably behaved and added even more 'ahhh' factor to this show.

The other thing I noticed was that this was very much a high-energy show which required dancing; something that has been lacking in former MMY shows, probably because the chosen show did not really require choreography. With this show it is a prerequisite and so it was lovely to see that some of these young performers really are 'triple threats'. The dancing wasn't of the highest standard, but it was good enough and worked for them.

Watching MMY though it is all too easy to forget that it is both amateur and a youth group. Their dedication, professionalism, commitment and indeed talent all tell the senses otherwise. Credit to absolutely all involved, but especially **Kimberley Holden**, the Musical Director; whose music sounded utterly flawless and superb last night, and the singing was, as always with MMY, excellent; and to **Dan Jarvis**, who has the unenviable task of directing and coordinating everyone and everything to bring his vision of the show to fruition.

There was only one 'fault' last night. The set was good, and worked well. It was nicely designed and multi-purpose. The only problem was it was a bit loud. This was never more apparent than with the prison gates. Sadly the noise of this metal being moved upstaged the principal solo happening at the time. Shame.

Otherwise, pink is now officially the new black, and Oh My God Oh My God Oh My God - what a show!!