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Nikki Gil and Geneva Cruz bring a new definition to the term "blonde moment."

## The verdict on 'Legally Blonde: The Musical'

By Mirava M. Yuson The Philippine Star Updated July 09, 2010 12:00 AM

MANILA, Philippines - Thursday, June 24 marked the preview of Atlantis Productions' latest endeavor: Legally Blonde: The Musical. The title says it all: it's based on the movie that cemented Reese Witherspoon's A-list status and made a recognizable dent in the "dumb blonde" stereotype.

This 2007 adaptation developed by Laurence O'Keefe and Nell Benjamin is a retelling of Elle Woods' entry into Harvard Law School at the beck and call of her boyfriend (in her words, "Love! Doing this for love!") — except with a bit more singing and dancing, and a lot more pink.

In fact, many in the audience received the memo to come dressed in that color. As it was, it seemed that quite a number in the appreciative crowd had kept such dazzling outfits in their closets simply for this specific occasion. With so many people eager to play along, it was no surprise that the auditorium was racked with hysterical laughter and enthusiastic applause from the first five minutes onwards.

And therein lies the beauty (some may call it the downfall) of a musical like Legally Blonde. One's enjoyment is very much dependent on how much you are willing to play along — or suspend your disbelief — with such a concept. How believable, for example, is it for a woman like Elle to get an LSAT score of 174? How believable is Nikki Gil in a blonde wig? And, to put oneself in Elle's sequin-studded shoes, how believable is it for a man like Warner (her ex-boyfriend) to choose the most boorish girl possible over Elle?

Unexpectedly, you may have an easier time than you think the moment the stage, scintillatingly framed in hot pink, opens up to reveal a gorgeous set, adorned with giant books (and several other book-shaped props that avid readers would love to have in their own home). In contrast with these are equally gorgeous sorority girls dancing around in their myriad wardrobes.

The play makes its stance clear from the get-go: there are two types of people in the world, and one is either a serious, boring lawyer or a non-serious fashion-loving cheerleader. There's only room for one type of crowd, though: the one that knows well enough not to take the zany production too seriously. And, of course, there are always exceptions for each stereotype.

If the set alone isn't enough to keep one's eyebrows from reaching one's hairline, the performers themselves attempt to dance skepticism away. Assisting Elle Woods (Nikki Gil) on her quest to win back Warner (Guji Lorenzana) are her personal Greek-chorus-slash-sorority-friends led by Yannah Lauren, Emerita Alcid and Myrene Santos, who played off each other well and broke the tension with their song-and-dance interludes.

There's also her newfound friend Paulette (Jinky Llamanzares), who was as much of a scene-stealer as her short shorts-clad love interest Kyle (Calvin Millado), more famously known as the "UPS guy" in the movie. The two were an awesome combo and quickly became the crowd favorites.

Other players include Cris Villonco, who is delightful as Elle's rival Vivienne, and Nyoy Volante whose sympathetic performance as Emmett Forrest, a struggling Mark Ruffalo-esque character, was a fitting one — as proof that one of the advantages the



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musical has over the movie adaptation is its development in characterization. Emmett has much more of a presence in this version, though the thunder still rightfully steers itself towards Professor Callahan (Jett Pangan), as performed with quick wit and all the finesse it takes to be the cut-throat lawyer everyone loves to hate but secretly wants to be.

At this point, it is necessary to note that one does not have to see the movie before watching the play. Legally Blonde: The Musical covers exactly the same story, but there are quite a few differences as compared to the movie. As mentioned earlier, characters are fleshed out better, and it's not just because they get to belt out solos. For the ones that do get that opportunity, their efforts do not go unnoticed.

Another break-out character is client Brooke Wyndham. Geneva Cruz made her appearance memorable as she stepped out on stage with white blonde hair and a pixie cut reminiscent of the Great Chenoweth, and performed a vigorous song number that awed the crowd.

And now for the question of how well Nikki Gil fits into Reese Witherspoon's (or Lauren Bell Bundy's, for musical aficionados) bunny outfits. In this case, it does not even require a lowering of one's defenses to realize Gil's success in throwing herself into the role. Already known to shine in the vocal department, here she shows off her comedy chops and dance moves. Her portrayal of Elle is much more snarky. Showing that the character isn't 99 percent air-headed under all those hair-care products, Gil makes the notion clear that perhaps Miss Woods was clever enough to get into Harvard, after all. Therefore, the answer to the question is a resounding yes, as affirmed by the crowd's appreciative standing ovation that night.

Injecting some much-needed energy into the production is Beth Martin's team of musicians, who exhibited the exuberance of a marching band, fittingly enough. The songs are nothing too complex, though the first song alone (Omigod You Guys) already alerted many to symptoms of LSS. The cast's rendition of Bend and Snap is another number to look forward to, doing justice to its famed movie (and book) origins. Also, be on the lookout for the charming depiction of Bruiser Woods the Chihuahua.

This play certainly deserved to be a Tony nominee. Realistically, it is no Phantom of the Opera, nor is it the eagerly awaited Cats. However, this light-hearted musical is formidable enough on its own. As Elle Woods so dutifully insists, it (and she) are serious in their efforts. Therefore, it deserves better than a simple "guilty pleasure" status. It was an absolute pleasure to watch, and the verdict is (pun shamelessly intended)... not guilty. Because those of us, in pink and otherwise, were loud and proud in our enjoyment.

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Directed by Chari Arespachoga, Legally Blonde runs until July 18, in Meralco Theatre. For tickets, call Atlantis Productions at 892-7078 or 840-1167 or TicketWorld at 891-9999. For more information, visit [www.atlantisproductions.com](http://www.atlantisproductions.com).

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