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# Odeum provide several good Reasons to Be Pretty impressed

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Described by several critics as a misanthrope whose works focus on the darker side of humanity, Neil LaBute often places heavy demands on his audience. Tirades of relentless invective, ruthless dissections of the nature of self and of human relationships, outbursts of physical and emotional violence, LaBute's works are not for the faint of heart. Even less so for any faint hearted theatre company who might consider producing them. Luckily Odeum Theatre Company are more than up to the task as their rollercoaster production of LaBute's Tony nominated *Reasons to Be Pretty*, currently running at the [Tulsa Performing Arts Center](#), ably testifies.

Taking off with the speed of a car chase and the force of a freight train, *Reasons to Be Pretty* begins with Greg and Steph engaged in a violent argument. Steph is fuming over an overheard comment her long term boyfriend Greg had made to his workmate Kent about the ordinariness of her face, which was relayed back to her by her close friend, and Kent's wife, Carly. Greg doesn't get why she's so upset as he'd meant the comment as a compliment and as the scene unfolds the breakdown of their relationship is conveyed with brutal honesty. In what follows Greg tries to win Steph back as all around him his relationships with those closest to him, and with himself, undergo permanent and often unexpected changes.

In tackling the role of the insecure Steph, whose sense of self-worth has been totally destroyed, Leslie Long brings such overwhelming energy that she risks becoming more a visceral force of nature than a flesh and blood character for a time. But Long reigns it in beautifully and the contrast between the earlier hell-hath-no-fury Steph and her later portrayal of Steph as a woman who has come to some difficult realisations and made some hard decisions runs the gamut from humorous, to touching, to heart breaking. Lizzy Gigliotti-Samples, bringing just the right amount of arrogance and superiority to her portrayal of the initially self-righteous Carly, is wonderfully understated as a woman who sees herself as being afflicted with beauty. As Carly's life unravels Gigliotti-Samples gives an incredibly nuanced performance in which the development and humanising of Carly is portrayed with such grace and finesse as to be profoundly moving.

Derick Snow's performance as the loud mouthed Kent, a bullying misogynist cheating on his wife, is an absolute joy to watch, creating moments of laugh out loud humor and of unsettling physical and emotional brutality. As his long suffering friend Greg, a lost soul lost in books, a soul numbing job and a series of relationships he can't quite make sense of, David A. Lawrence's brings such a

rarely witnessed level of conviction and naturalism, it could only be achieved by an exceptionally gifted actor at the height of his game.

Lawrence also takes the plaudits for lighting and (along with director Will Carpenter) for set design, both of which are extremely well done. However, the natural layout of the Norman Theatre does pose some problems which the set strives valiantly to overcome to ensure all audience members have an unhindered view.

Director Will Carpenter has crafted a production in which the cast have obviously been given the freedom and encouragement to explore and express themselves under his direction, and the result is some memorable and mesmerising performances. But perhaps Carpenter's greatest achievement has been in avoiding a reductive reading of *Reasons to Be Pretty* and in teasing out the humanity as well as the inhumanity, the humor as well as the rage, the love as well as the hatred which are paramount to understanding this play. For LaBute's *Reasons to Be Pretty* is not simply an exploration beauty, it is also an incredibly touching love story, a sometimes humorous exploration of self and relationships and an in depth questioning of the roles of men and women in society, all of which Carpenter successfully manages to bring to the surface in this wonderfully realised production.

Challenging plays are not always easy to take and Odeum's *Reasons to Be Pretty* is undoubtedly a mature production of a mature play for mature audiences. But it is one that is expertly done, brilliantly performed and one which will handsomely repay any investment the audience dares to make in it.

*Reasons to Be Pretty* runs at the Norman Theatre, Tulsa Performing Arts Center from February 17th– 20th and from February 24th– 27th at 8.00 p.m.

Sunday, matinees only, 2.00 p.m.

Admission \$20.00



**Chris O'Rourke**  
Tulsa Theater Examiner

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