

THEATER

Legally Blonde Star Remembers Her Local Roots

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Despite her powerful vocals and masterful acting chops, it's not her autograph for which fans stop Orfeh, a Tony-award, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award nominee for her performance in Broadway's "Legally Blonde The Musical." "It's the 'bend and snap,'" laughs Orfeh, referring to her signature move in the show.

"Two girls came up to me in a restaurant last week, they were practically shaking and crying, and they asked me to do the bend and snap. I was in the middle of stuffing my face with rigatoni, I was a little like, 'Okay...mwhmm...'"

Anyone who has seen the film "Legally Blonde" would know the 'bend and snap' as the move Elle teaches the shy manicurist, Paulette (played by Jennifer Coolidge), so that she can get guys to notice her. In the new musical, Orfeh puts her own spin on the eccentric, but fun-loving character, amidst humorous songs such as "Ireland" and "Bend and Snap."

"Jennifer Coolidge is one of my idols, but I felt like it would be a disservice to her if I were to copy her in any way, there's no one who can do that character better," Orfeh said. "So in order to just do it, you have to take it vastly in another direction. I got lucky that people keyed in to what it is that I was trying to bring as far as Paulette is concerned."

Orfeh is no stranger to the stage, having originated roles in both "Footloose" and "Saturday Night Fever" on Broadway. She started her career in the music world as founder and lead singer of the pop sensation Or-N-More, and saw their hit single "Everyotherday" become a sensation. But she was singing long before she was hypnotized by Broadway and the music business. Her mother knew she was meant for the stage, and with this thinking in tow, Orfeh was given her unique moniker.

"My dad used to sing, so I think she just thought I would inherit his genes, and I did, thankfully!" she said. "My mother loved the story and character of Orpheus, and she thought boy or girl, that's it, that's her name. She just



Orfeh, who pulls her inspiration from her Long Island acting roots, plays the role of Paulette in Broadway's "Legally Blonde The Musical" alongside Andy Karl, her real-life husband and co-star in the show.

abbreviated it.

Orfeh began demonstrating her talent when she started singing jingles with the television set at 6 years old.

She grew up in New York City, and even attended a high school for performing arts. But Orfeh considers Long Island her second home, seeing as how she spent much of her childhood in the Huntington area.

"The local theatre is phenomenal," she said when asked about her favorite local experiences. "One of my best friends grew up nearby, and I spent a lot of time at her house. She had this big beautiful house, and I was a city kid, so on the weekends if we wanted to get away we would go there. Her younger sister was always performing in the local theater, and I loved going to see her. I spent a lot of time doing that.

There has been plenty of noise surrounding Orfeh's performance in "Legally Blonde The Musical," and anyone could have heard the loud cheering as she walked the red carpet hand-in-hand with her hunky co-star/husband Andy Karl, at the 2007 Tony Awards.

"When you come from the music business and grow up in New York or on Long Island, your life revolves around coming to Radio City somehow, some way. I didn't know what route my career would take, I didn't know that I would get to the Tonys at some point, I thought it would more likely see the big lights when I was headlining my own concert tour. But at some point in my life I was always passing Radio City going, 'What if I...?' You dare to dream, but you don't quite know how it's going to manifest," Orfeh said. "So once I was sitting there in the fifth row, *on the aisle*, being a part of the reason the show was happening, it was probably the coolest thing I could professionally have had the great good fortune to experience. You just keep going 'I know I'm here, but wow, are you really here?'"

The award went to Mary Louise Wilson of *Grey Gardens*, but Orfeh is still thrilled that she gets to star in a musical that can raise anyone's spirits with its themes of strength in friendships and following one's dreams.

"I think people have keyed into the girls and their relationship because Elle doesn't realize she can be strong and look the way she does, and Paulette doesn't realize that she's not this hapless victim. They have this mutually beneficial relationship without trying. That's what a natural, good friendship is," she said. "You just key into somebody and you have this natural affinity for them, and you wind up being friends with them for life."

People are evidently responding to the emotions that come from Orfeh's funny, yet relatable performance, because, she says, a lot of the same people have been known for visiting the show four times each week, and are always excited to tell her how much they loved it! "Obviously it strikes a chord with them!" she said excitedly, her big smile glowing. On top of that awesome bend and snap, there's no question as to the many reasons why.