*Wicked*

by

*Eyes Right*

**Springfield, VA –** I usually do not worry about having my “man card” revoked. I have been in lingerie departments shopping for clothing for my wife, I have read several romance novels, and I have been seen with *Vogue* in public. However, I was sufficiently confident of my “maleness” that none of these dalliances were cause for concern. My buddies all understood.

But….as I was approaching the ticket booth to purchase a ticket for the new movie, *Wicked,* I kept looking over my shoulder, to my right and left…everywhere. Once I reached the darkness of the theater, all would be well until I had to devise a way to sneak out undetected. I felt so exposed in that line, as if, I was heading into a porn shop just as my pastor caught a glimpse of me from her passing car.

As far as I know, I did make into and out of the movie undetected. This film was not inexpensive. $18.99 for the senior matinee ticket, followed by roughly 24 more bucks for a Slurpee-type drink and a large popcorn. (How do teens possibly take a date to one of these?? Knock off a few liquor stores on the way to the theater??)

I had arrived early. Although it was the first day of national theater distribution for *Wicked*, no one else was there. When the movie began about 30 minutes later, there were now only four of us. One rather heavy guy got up and left 20 minutes after the show began. He had sat through what seemed to be endless previews (all for future movies of which I had zero interest). So three of us watched this showing. Apparently, many others across the U.S. did attend as *Wicked* reportedly grossed $114 million over its first weekend.

I have not seen a stage production of *Wicked* which premiered over 20 years ago in San Francisco before heading to Broadway and then London. The play was loosely based on a 1995 novel by Gregory Maguire (which was based on Frank Baum’s 1900 novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz)* and was transformed into a musical by composer and lyricist Steven Schwartz. The original actresses were Idina Menzel as Elphaba (the Wicked Witch of the West) and Kristin Chenowith as Galinda (Glinda the Good). Joel Grey played the Wizard. As a money-maker, the musical hit the jackpot, passing a billion dollars in Broadway revenue by 2016, and counting.

Most of the women I know have seen the play at least once, and many several times. All that I have spoken to recently say that they will be going to the movie. Actually, they will be initially seeing only Part 1 – the second part will not appear until late next year and will undoubtedly cost even more.

The movie version I saw was in 3-D. This allowed me to see evil monkeys flying directly at me, both in the opening sequence and in some intense scenes near the end. My overall impression was awe at the technical skills which allow a fantasy such as this to be shown in such grandiose manner. For example, when one of the actresses is shown running through a lengthy field of tall grass (or wheat?), the stalks are all moving and where she has walked is appropriately trampled – all artificially generated. The acting is superb. A British actress, Cynthia Erivo, transforms Elphaba into a supremely intelligent, but anguished, young woman who is confused, and angered, by her burden of having been born with green skin. Her eyes continually signal internal conflict. The other female lead, Ariana Grande, is the over-privileged, clueless, Galinda, who ultimately accepts the name, Glinda, because her professor at Wizard School, a goat, cannot pronounce the Ga at the beginning of her name. Grande proves herself to be a rather effective comedienne with timely facial expressions and clever body gestures.

Above all, *Wicked* is a musical with catchy lyrics and grandiosely choreographed set pieces involving a cast of well over 100. I was not familiar with the music and did not find myself humming any of the tunes as I left the theater nearly 2 ½ hours later. What was on my mind was the technical challenges of creating such a production. There is, for example, one set involving large, vertical rotating gears with dancers flitting about, sometimes upside down.

Obviously, there are other far more philosophical questions posed by *Wicked*. A woman, through no fault of her own, is born “different” from others and must face a life often involving humiliation and scorn. A man held in high esteem is shown to have a dark side. Another woman born into wealth and privilege has little concern for others. Just as in our real lives, it is difficult to understand the lasting ramifications of “the accident of birth.”

Mainers love to say, “Wicked good!” My evaluation: “*Wicked* okay.”

I thought you might like to know.

E-R