

LEADING LADIES steals fame and fortune

ALLIE CARSON
NEWS EDITOR

“Leading Ladies” is the perfect closing for the season with its Shakespearean themes and great acting. The Arkansas State theatre department’s last show of the 2025-2026 school year opened the curtain last weekend.

A show based on one of Shakespeare’s plays and gender-bending tropes, “Leading Ladies” was one of



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Donovan Walter playing Jack, who is pretending to be Stephanie, in A-State Theaters production of “Leading Ladies.”

the most comically unserious shows I’ve seen in my lifetime.

If you’re unfamiliar with the trope and how much it’s used in modern media, 2000s romcom “She’s the Man” and musical “All Shook Up” use the gender-bending, falling for each other plot while playing a person they’re not.

Zane Brewer as Leo and Donovan Walters as Jack were hilarious throughout. Their comedic timing and physical comedy made the audience laugh with each scene. Both Brewer and Walters played their alternative female roles extremely well. Brewer as Maxine and Walters as “deaf and dumb” Stephanie play their respective alter egos very well.

It wasn’t just the two leading ladies who stole the show, however, as all of the actors were fun to watch as they each brought something fun to the show.

The show incorporates the audience as well, specifically with the use of Connor Ernes at the beginning, using call-and-response with the audience in the scene where Leo and Jack are first introduced. It’s a fun scene and a great way to get the audience involved and set the tone for the rest of the show.

Skylar Hilderbrand played Florence, the old and supposedly dead grandmother to Maxine and Stephanie. They absolutely killed the old and crickety grandma vibe.

Hilderbrand’s comedic timing towards the end, where everyone thought she died, only to get on to Ernes’ primary character, Doc, for calling her dead early, was hilarious. Hilderbrand perfectly delivered the scene and made it a great way to end the show.

Audrey, played by Maggie Martin, is the ditzy and bubbly friend of Meg, played by Zoey Newcomb. Audrey was absolutely oblivious to everything and Martin played her brilliantly. Her character’s introduction of coming in on roller skates seemed to be a genuine hazard to everyone around her. Either she actually couldn’t skate or she did an incredible job at acting like she couldn’t.

Garret Veal played a great villain for the show. He expertly played the part of a normal preacher who actually distrusts and dislikes his in-laws’ side of the family, including his own fiancée. His character felt like someone I’d run into on the street or in my small town.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

(Left) Garrett Veal, Zane Brewer, Zoey Newcomb and Donovan Walters playing Duncan, Leo, Meg and Jack, respectively, in A-State Theaters production of “Leading Ladies.” Meg believed she was meeting her long-lost cousins for the first time, when it was actually Leo and Jack in disguise.

Newcomb’s Meg was the perfect fangirl towards Leo and looked up to Maxine, often leaving her fiancé, Duncan, played by Veal, behind. Newcomb’s expressions throughout the show were fun to pay attention to. While it’s her A-State theatre debut, she’ll be one to keep an eye out for over the next few theatre seasons.

In case you couldn’t catch “Leading Ladies” this past weekend, the show goes on this weekend at 7:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, with a 2:30 performance on Sunday in the

Fowler Center’s Drama Theatre.

If you’ve already seen it, stay tuned for the 2026-2027 A-State Theatre season. Upcoming shows are listed below: “The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged) [Revised] [Revised Again]”

A show combining all of Shakespeare’s works into one continuous story, continuing the Shakespearean genre from “Leading Ladies” to the start of next season. “Little Shop of Horrors”

The musical of the season, a popular one at that, follows a down-on-his-luck florist who accidentally creates a sentient plant who wants to eat human flesh and blood.

“An Evening of New Works” A concert-style presentation of short plays by A-State Playwrights. “Men on Boats”

A comedy story following determined explorers as they travel down the Colorado River.

Students get in for free by presenting their student I.D. at the door.



Bieberchella



Timothée Chalamet triggers backlash over ballet and opera comments



Alysa Liu “Stateside” performance at the 2026 Winter Olympics



“Euphoria” season 3 receives immediate backlash

Top pop-culture moments of 2026 (so far)



Sydney Sweeneys “Syd for Shorts” campaign with American Eagle



Bad Bunny Super Bowl Halftime Show



Taylor Frankie Pauls “Bachelorette” season cancelled after domestic violence allegations



“Sinners” makes Oscars history

THE RETURN OF DYSTOPIA

AMELIA YOUNG

LIFE EDITOR

This year is a big year for those who loved “The Maze Runner,” “The Hunger Games,” “Divergent” and the dystopian genre in general.

The much anticipated sequel of “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes” and the prequel to “The Hunger Games” trilogy “Sunrise on the Reaping” is set to come out this November, and fans could not be more ready. Lionsgate released the first official trailer for the film detailing the 50th Hunger Games from Haymitch Abernathy’s, played by Joseph Zada, perspective on April 13.

Fans have already begun to praise the film for its use of color, one commenter on YouTube even saying “Seeing a movie without Netflix lighting is such a breath of fresh air.” But “Sunrise on the Reaping” isn’t the only next installment in one of the biggest dystopian franchises.

Veronica Roth, author of the “Divergent” book series, announced the release of “The Sixth Faction” on Sunday, April 19 at BookCon 2026. “The Sixth Faction” is not a sequel, prequel or a spinoff of

“Divergent,” but an alternate universe where Beatrice Prior, the main character of the series, chooses a different faction and not Dauntless.

When someone mentions the “big three” dystopian movies, they’re usually referencing “The Hunger Games,” “Divergent” and “The Maze Runner.” All three of these were book series that were turned into majorly successful movie franchises.

In 2024, there were murmurs of a “Maze Runner” reboot being in the works, but so far nothing has actually come out. The book series has nine books in total, three in the main trilogy, two prequels, a novella and a sequel trilogy.

New films are also coming out that show dystopia is back and ready to take the world by storm once again.

“The Long Walk” an adaptation of Stephen King’s novel with the same title, follows a group of boys who must maintain a certain walking speed or be shot, and was incredibly well-received by critics and fans. You’re not going to hear any complaints from me if the dystopian genre does in fact make a comeback this year.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DATELINE