

A Study Guide  
Of  
*Little Shop of Horrors*

A Musical

Book by Howard Ashman / Lyrics by Howard Ashman / Music by Alan Menken  
Based on the film by Roger Corman / Screenplay by Charles Griffith

**FORT WAYNE CIVIC THEATRE**

**IN THE WINGS**  
**Arts-In-Education Program**

**PERFORMANCES FOR SCHOOLS**  
**Saturday, November 3, 2007 @ 2:00 p.m.**

**PERFORMANCES FOR SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**Thursday, November 8, 2007 @ 7:30 p.m.**

*Study guide written*  
*by*  
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## **THE COMPOSER** (From *Encyclopedia of World Biography* on Alan Menken: [www.bookrags.com/biography/alan-menken/](http://www.bookrags.com/biography/alan-menken/))

Before the age of 50, composer Alan Menken (born 1949) had won eight Academy awards and four Grammy Awards. His scores for the Walt Disney animated films of the 1990s as well as his success on the Broadway stage have some crediting him with the return of both genres. Disney seems convinced as well, having asked Menken to prepare the score for all of their animated films as well as some live action features over a ten year period.

Alan Menken was born on July 22, 1949 in New Rochelle, New York. He was interested in music from an early age and studied both piano and violin in high school. His musical tastes were broad in scope, and included classical, show tunes, rock, and folk. Menken enrolled at New York University in 1967 where, for a time, he took pre-med courses in order to please his parents. His true passion won out, however, and Menken decided to pursue a musical career. Following graduation, he worked as a songwriter and performed in some New York area clubs. He also wrote and sang commercial jingles.

Menken's career took a swift upswing after he attended the Lehman Engel Musical Workshop of Broadcast Music Inc (BMI). Engel, a former Broadway pit-band conductor, had become a mentor of sorts for those aspiring to be a part of modern musical theater. The experience led him to playwright Howard Ashman. In 1978, Ashman chose Menken to collaborate with him on a musical version of Kurt Vonnegut's story, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. BMI also showcased a number of Menken's musicals from 1971 to 1985.

### **An Off-Broadway Success**

In 1982, Menken and Ashman revamped a 1960 Roger Corman cult film and turned it into the off-Broadway hit, *Little Shop of Horrors*. The show won Best Musical awards from the New York Drama Critics, the Drama Desk, the Outer Critics Circle, and the *London Evening Standard*. In 1983, Menken received a BMI Career Achievement Award for his body of work for the musical theater, including: *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Real Life Funnies*, as well as his various contributions to musical revues. The *Little Shop of Horrors* musical was turned into a successful Hollywood motion picture in 1986, directed by Frank Oz. The all-star cast included Rick Moranis, Steve Martin, John Candy and Bill Murray. The film's theme song, *Mean Green Mother From Outer Space*, earned Menken an Academy Award Nomination for Best Song. Menken's father was the inspiration for Steve Martin's character in the film: a sadistic biker-dentist with a nitrous oxide habit. Menken's father was a respected area dentist and president of the American Analgesia Society, an organization that promoted the use of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) as a safe anesthetic.

### **Cartoon Classics**

Menken and Ashman paired up again for 1989's animated Disney hit *The Little Mermaid*. The show earned the duo their first Academy and Golden Globe Awards for Best Score and Best Song for *Under the Sea*. Two years later, the duo had another success with Disney's, *Beauty and The Beast*. Again, the two won the Academy and Golden Globe Awards for Best Score and Best Song. In the meantime, Menken and Ashman were gaining recognition for their sophisticated work from other quarters; some were even crediting them with the revitalization of the American movie musical.

"Of course there'd been songs--and wonderful songs--in Disney films from time immemorial," Stephen Schwartz, the lyricist for *Pocahontas*, told the *Los Angeles Daily Times*, "but I think Howard and Alan pioneered the sort of storytelling song idea. If you look at a number like "Belle" in *Beauty and The Beast*, or even "Poor Unfortunate Souls" in *Little Mermaid*, those are the kind of advance-the-plot, storytelling songs that you would use in a Broadway show."

For their next project, Ashman approached Disney with the idea of turning the story of Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp into a cartoon. Menken worked with Ashman to create a proposal, including a blueprint and the songs. Before this project had been completed Ashman passed away from AIDS-related complications. Tim Rice, librettist for *Evita* and *Chess*, was called upon

to complete the work. Menken and Rice were nominated for a Grammy Award for "A Whole New World (Aladdin's Theme)" in 1992. Because of the death of Ashman, recognition for this song was bittersweet. Menken told the *Kansas City Star* in 1997, "The enormity of AIDS' impact on the arts - what would today's theater be like if we still had Michael Bennett and Howard Ashman and Steve Brown and countless other directors, choreographers and composers who are now gone? But I honestly think the loss of Howard Ashman is the biggest I can imagine. He had such a great command of style, storytelling and character."

In addition to his work for Disney, Menken worked on other successful film and music projects in the early 1990s. He wrote "The Measure of a Man," the theme song to *Rocky V*, recorded by Elton John in 1990. Two years later, he wrote the score for the ABC mini-series, *Lincoln*. He also collaborated with Jack Feldman on "My Christmas Tree" for *Home Alone 2*, and the Disney live-action musical film *Newsies*.

### **Back to Off-Broadway**

Menken made a return to his off-Broadway roots in 1992 at the WPA Theater on West 23rd Street in New York. This was the theater where he and Ashman had collaborated to produce the score for *Little Shop of Horrors* ten years prior. Menken and Spencer collaborated to create the musical *Weird Romance*. The show, directed by Barry Harman, was performed in two acts, based on two science fiction stories. The first was *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, by Alice B. Sheldon (written under the name James Tiptree Jr.), a sort of Pygmalion tale set in a future with robots. The second, *Her Pilgrim Soul*, by Alan Brennert, is a tragic love story about a dead woman who is reincarnated in hologram form to live the rest of her life through a computer. Brennert wrote the book for the musical as well.

Menken collaborated with Rice again in 1994 on the stage musical adaptation of *Beauty and The Beast*. He had recommended the project to Disney several times. Disney spent \$12 million to put the show together, making it the most expensive Broadway musical until that time. Menken and Rice wrote eight new songs, in addition to the Menken-Ashman songs. The stage version was directed by Robert Jess Roth and choreographed by Matt West. Star singers Debbie Gibson and Toni Braxton both played the role of Belle; Gary Beach, who played Lumiere, was nominated for a Tony Award for his role. The musical received several Tony Award and Drama Desk Award nominations, including Best Musical, but was ultimately overshadowed by Stephen Sondheim's *Passion*. Critic Michael Grossberg of the *Columbus Dispatch* wrote, "Contrary to popular rumor, Lloyd Webber is not today's only mega-successful theatrical composer. Alan Menken expanded his score for *Beauty and The Beast* when the Disney-animated film was adapted into the lavish Broadway musical. Menken's songs with lyricist Tim Rice didn't quite measure up to Menken's lively, lovely work with his late partner, lyricist Howard Ashman, but Gaston's pompous ode to himself ("Me") ranks high as rousing musical comedy."

In 1995, Menken collaborated with Stephen Schwartz on the score for Disney's *Pocahontas*, and won the 1995 Academy Award for Best Score and Best Song as well as the Golden Globe Award for "Colors of the Wind," performed by Vanessa Williams. Menken told the *Los Angeles Daily Times*, "I would be less than honest if I didn't express a certain frustration when the animated projects are referred to as 'for kids.' They're not kids' music, and I get upset when someone comes up to me and goes: 'Alan Menken, it's nice to meet you. My three-year-old just loves your songs.' And I'm now able to translate that in my brain into, 'I love your songs.'"

The next Menken-Schwartz collaboration for Disney was thought to be a little less suitable for children. Based on Victor Hugo's gothic 19th-century tale, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was darker than previous Menken projects, though Disney did brighten the plot considerably. Critic Susan Stark wrote in *The Detroit News*, "Like *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and The Beast*, and *Aladdin*, *Hunchback* will likely yield not one, but at least two best song Oscar nominations for Menken, plus a nomination for best score. Precedent says he'll win in both categories, which will make him the top Oscar winner of all time." Although the score was considered ambitious, it did not earn Menken a ninth Academy Award.

Menken's *King David* oratorio, with libretto by Tim Rice, was supposed to premiere in Jerusalem during the summer of 1996 as part of the Jerusalem 3000 celebrations. The show was not ready in time, however, so it opened a year later in New York in honor of Disney's New Amsterdam Theater on Broadway. Menken, Rice, and director Mike Ockrenthad had gone to Jerusalem in November 1994 to research the project. They met with biblical and archeological scholars in order to create a more authentic show. The resulting program, which opened to tepid reviews on May 18, 1997, was a two-hour-and-forty-five-minute epic covering the life of a shepherd-turned-king in Israel.

The following month, Disney's *Hercules* opened, with score by Menken and lyricist David Zippel. Michael Bolton was selected to sing the track, "Go the Distance" over the closing credits. Critics said the gospel music-inspired soundtrack was a return to the levity of *Aladdin* in this film about an Ancient Greek "nobody" who becomes a hero.

### **Recognition and Rewards**

In 1998, at BMI's annual Film and Television Awards, the Richard Kirk Award was presented to Alan Menken for Outstanding Career Achievement. Menken also won a BMI Film Music Award for *Hercules*. Michael Eisner, Chairman and CEO of the Walt Disney Company commented, "Alan, it is impossible to fully appreciate what you have achieved in just ten years. In that time, you have helped revive two great American institutions: the animated film and the Broadway musical. When historians write about this era of entertainment, you will be cited as one of the driving forces. Your talent, devotion and tireless energy have made our movies and our shows sing again."

In early 1998, Menken entered into a multi-million dollar agreement with Walt Disney Studios to compose songs and scores for their live-action and animated movies for the next ten years. He will be the exclusive composer for the animated films and will also be allowed to work on one non-Disney, live-action project every two years. This was one of the longest-term contracts in studio history.

### **Back to the Stage**

In June 1999, Menken opened the stage version of Disney's *Hunchback* in Berlin. Matt Wolf commented in *Variety*, that this was the most sombre Disney stage show to date. "So why isn't the show as a whole more affecting?" Wolf asks. He concludes that Schwartz and Menken's score "tilts toward the generic." Menken has become philosophic about such criticisms. As he told the *Hartford Courant*, "Ironically, as you know, as we move forward in time, our culture is moving into a less sophisticated period musically. Were I to write a very beautiful, complicated, sophisticated melody, it would never have a snowball's chance of being heard."

In late 1999, Menken began collaborating with Alice Cooper, the original shock-rocker, on a project that was yet to be completely defined--it would be a Broadway show, a cartoon, or a rock show. Cooper told the *San Diego Union-Tribune* that the project was called *Alice's Deadly Seven* and was based on the Seven Deadly Sins. "This is probably the strangest combination since Burt Bacharach and Elvis Costello," Cooper said. "(It's) got my words and Alan's melodies and both of us collaborating on arrangements. It's basically three quarters written, and it won't be coming out for two years."

Currently the stage musical version of *The Little Mermaid* is landing on Broadway in the fall of 2007 while *Leap of Faith* and *Sister Act* are works in progress in regional theaters. The Disney film *Enchanted* will be hitting screens in November of 2007.

Menken and his wife Janis, a former ballet dancer, reside in Katonah, New York with their two children.

Stage credits: *Little Shop of Horrors*; *Beauty and The Beast*; *A Christmas Carol*; *King David*; *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*; *Real Life Funnies*; *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*; *Weird Romance*; and *Der Glockner von Notre Dame*

Film credits: *The Shaggy Dog* (2006), *A Christmas Carol: The Musical* (2004), *Home on the Range* (2004), *Noel* (2004), *Hercules* (1997), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Life with Mikey* (1993), *Aladdin* (1992), *Lincoln* (1992), *Newsies* (1992), *Beauty and The Beast* (1991), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), *The Line* (1980).

Other achievements: a Billboard #1 album (*Pocahontas*) and #1 single ("A Whole New World").

Awards include eight Academy Awards, seven Golden Globes, 10 Grammy Awards, the London Evening Standard Award, the Olivier, the New York Drama Critics Award, the Drama Desk and the Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical

## **THE PLAYWRIGHT & LYRICIST** ([http://disney.go.com/DisneyRecords/Biographies/Ashman\\_Bio.html](http://disney.go.com/DisneyRecords/Biographies/Ashman_Bio.html))

**Howard Ashman** (1951-1991) followed a distinguished career as a musical comedy librettist, lyricist, playwright, and director with his animated feature film debut, Disney's critically and popularly celebrated *The Little Mermaid*. Ashman received the 1989 Academy Award® for Best Song for "Under the Sea," written with his longtime collaborator, Alan Menken. Ashman and Menken garnered a total of six awards for *The Little Mermaid*, including two Academy Awards®, two Golden Globe Awards®, and two Grammy Awards®.

Born in Baltimore, Ashman received his education at Goddard College and Boston University, and earned an MFA from Indiana University. He moved to New York in 1974 and became an editor at Grosset & Dunlap, while he wrote plays, including *'Cause Maggie's Afraid of the Dark*, *The Confirmation*, and *Dreamstuff*, a musical version of *The Tempest*. *Dreamstuff* marked the start of his association with the Off-Off Broadway WPA Theatre, of which he became Art Director when it reopened in the fall of 1977. Ashman was the WPA's guiding force from 1977 to 1982. In 1979, he and Alan Menken wrote a musical version of Kurt Vonnegut's *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*.

Ashman's greatest success at WPA was the musical version of Roger Corman's film *Little Shop of Horrors*, also written with Alan Menken. The musical received many awards, including the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the Best Musical of 1982-83. *Little Shop of Horrors* became the third longest-running musical in Off-Broadway history, as well as the highest-grossing musical in Off-Broadway history. The subsequent London production received the prestigious *Evening Standard* Award for Best Musical, and productions of *Little Shop of Horrors* were seen all over the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland, Mexico, Israel, South Africa, France, Austria, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, and Germany. *Little Shop of Horrors* is currently tied with *Our Town* as the most-produced play in high schools throughout America.

*Little Shop of Horrors* was subsequently filmed by Frank Oz for David Geffen. For the screen version, Ashman and Menken wrote two songs not included in the stage production. Ashman received his first Academy Award® nomination for Best Song, for "Mean Green Mother From Outer Space," in 1986.

Howard Ashman's unique theatrical gifts enabled him to create the book, lyrics, and direction for not only *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* and *Little Shop of Horrors*, but also for the 1986 Broadway production of *Smile*, written with Marvin Hamlisch, for which he received a Tony Award® nomination for Best Book.

Ashman completed work on the animated Disney feature *Beauty and The Beast*, as well as *Aladdin*, prior to his death in March 1991.

## **HISTORY** (From Music Theatre International - [http://www.mtishows.com/show\\_history.asp?ID=000188](http://www.mtishows.com/show_history.asp?ID=000188))

Based on the low-budget cult film by Roger Corman, *Little Shop Of Horrors* opened at the Orpheum Theatre Off-Broadway in New York City, playing over 2000 performances and becoming the highest-grossing and third longest-running musical in Off-Broadway history. The original production was directed by lyricist/librettist Howard Ashman and starred Lee Wilkof as Seymour, Ellen Greene as Audrey, and Martin P. Robinson and Ron Taylor as Audrey Two and his voice, respectively. The show received the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical. The London production received the Evening Standard Award for Best Musical. In addition to the original off-Broadway production, the musical has been performed all over the world including productions in Buenos Aires, Sydney, Vienna, São Paulo, Toronto, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Paris, Berlin, Athens, Budapest, Reykjavík, Jerusalem, Rome, Tokyo, Mexico City, Auckland, Oslo, Singapore City, Johannesburg, Madrid, Stockholm, and London. Because of its small cast and relatively simple orchestrations, it has recently become popular with community theatre and high school groups. The musical was also made into a film in 1986 and directed by Frank Oz of “Sesame Street” fame. The Warner Brothers film featured an all-star cast, including Rick Moranis as Seymour, Vincent Gardenia as Mushnik, Steve Martin as Orin, Ellen Greene reprising her role as Audrey, and cameo appearances by James Belushi, John Candy, Christopher Guest and Bill Murray.

### **Highlights of Major Awards Won**

2004 Tony® Award nominee

**Best Actor in a Musical -- Hunter Foster**

2004 Drama Desk Award nominee

**Outstanding Actor in a Musical -- Hunter Foster**

1987 Academy Award nominees

**Best Original Song -- Howard Ashman & Alan Menken**

1983 Outer Critics Circle Award winner  
**Best Off Broadway Musical -- *Little Shop of Horrors***

1983 Outer Critics Circle Award winners  
**Best Score -- Howard Ashman & Alan Menken**

1983 Grammy Award nominees  
**Best Musical Cast Show Album -- Alan Menken & Howard Ashman**

1983 NY Drama Critics Circle Award Winner  
**Best Musical -- *Little Shop of Horrors***

1983 Drama Desk Award nominee

**Outstanding Actress in a Musical -- Ellen Greene**

1983 Drama Desk Award nominee

**Outstanding Director-Musical -- Howard Ashman**

1983 Drama Desk Award winner

**Outstanding Lyrics -- Howard Ashman**

1983 Drama Desk Award nominee

**Outstanding Music -- Alan Menken**

1983 Drama Desk Award winner

**Outstanding Musical -- *Little Shop of Horrors***

1983 Drama Desk Award winners

**Outstanding Special Effects -- Ron Taylor & Martin P. Robinson**

## **CHARACTERS**

SEYMOUR - A hard-luck orphan living on Skid Row working as a clerk at Mr. Mushnik's flower shop. He is insecure, sweet, and loves strange plants.

AUDREY – The love of Seymour's life. A sweet, vulnerable, bleached-blond woman who dresses in spiked heels and low-cut dresses. She also works at the flower shop.

MR. MUSHNIK - The grim caretaker of Seymour and the owner of the Skid Row Flower Shop. He is also the boss of Seymour and Audrey.

ORIN - A tall, dark, handsome, leather-wearing dentist with sadistic tendencies who is Audrey's boyfriend. This actor also plays A Voice Not Unlike God's, Wino #2, Customer, Radio Announcer, Mr. Bernstein, Mrs. Luce, Skip Snip, and Patrick Martin.

THE PLANT (AUDREY II) - An anthropomorphic cross between a Venus flytrap and an avocado. It has a huge, nasty-looking pod which gains a shark-like aspect when open and snapping at food. The creature is played by a series of four increasing large puppets, manipulated by one Puppeteer. The same person also plays Wino #1 in the first scene. The first time we see The Plant, it is less than one foot tall. The last time we see it, it fills the entire stage.

VOICE OF THE PLANT - Provided by an actor on an offstage microphone. It is important that this actor have clear visual access to the puppets onstage, so that he can provide accurate lip-synch. The sound is a cross between Otis Redding, Barry White, and Wolfman Jack. Think of The Voice as that of a street-smart, funky, conniving villain — Rhythm and Blues' answer to Richard the Third.

CRYSTAL, RONNETTE AND CHIFFON - Three (originally black) female street urchins who function as participants in the action and a Greek Chorus outside it. They're young, hip, smart and the only people in the whole cast who REALLY know what's going on. In their "Greek Chorus" capacity, they occasionally sing to the audience directly. And when they do, it's often with a "secret-smile" that says: "we know something you don't know."

## **SYNOPSIS** *(from Music Theatre International - [http://www.mtishows.com/show\\_plot.asp?ID=000188](http://www.mtishows.com/show_plot.asp?ID=000188))*

### **Prologue**

A VOICE, not unlike God's, can be heard. It describes a deadly threat to humanity's existence. This deadly threat surfaced (as most deadly threats do) in the seemingly most innocent and unlikely of places. CRYSTAL, RONNETTE, and CHIFFON come on and introduce the musical with the title song ("Little Shop of Horrors"). Singing in the style of girl groups from the sixties, they warn the audience to beware of the dangers that will happen in the course of the story.

### **Act I, Scene 1**

The clock slowly moves from nine to ten a.m. in Mushnik's Skid Row Florists as an earsplitting crash echoes from the back room. SEYMOUR, in the back room, assures MUSHNIK that nothing is broken. As the clock hits two o'clock, AUDREY, Mushnik's dizzy blonde employee, comes in with a black-eye. Even though he has had no customers all day, Mushnik scolds her tardiness as another crash erupts from the back room. Noticing Audrey's black-eye, Mushnik suggests that her boyfriend is NOT a nice boy. Audrey reminds Mushnik that you don't meet nice boys on skid row. Seymour comes on with trays of re-potted plants and promptly sends them flying when he trips on his own feet in a dorky manner. Mushnik starts to yell at Seymour, but Audrey stops him. Seymour admires Audrey's eye makeup.

Fed up with his existence, his lousy business, and his misfit employees, Mushnik clears Ronnette, Crystal, and Chiffon off his stoop and tells them to go to school. Crystal says there's no such thing as "bettering yourself" on skid row and she, Ronnette, and Chiffon describe their

lives downtown (“Skid Row”). They can work uptown as clerks for jerks, but they always have to come downtown. Audrey joins in the song and complains that all the downtown guys are jerks and longs for something better. Seymour joins in the song as he wonders why he was set on the earth. He remembers that as an orphan, Mushnik took him in and forced him to work in the shop. Seymour constantly prays to get out of skid row. That sentiment is shared by Audrey and everyone who lives on skid row.

At six o’clock, without having even one customer, Mushnik announces that he is closing the flower shop for good. Seymour suggests that the shop should move in a new direction. He has been working on a strange and interesting plant that they could display in the window to attract customers. Because Seymour could not identify the plant in any book, he decided to name it Audrey Two. Mushnik thinks displaying the plant is a ridiculous idea. At the same time, a CUSTOMER shows up asking about the strange and interesting plant in the window. As the urchins back him up, Seymour describes how he bought the plant from an old Chinese man during a total eclipse of the sun (“Da-Doo”). Fascinated by the story, the Customer decides to buy one hundred dollars worth of roses. After the Customer leaves, Mushnik puts Audrey Two in the window and offers to take Seymour and Audrey out to dinner. Audrey declines because she has a date with her professional rebel. Seymour is still able to go to dinner, but Mushnik orders Seymour to stay with Audrey Two, who is wilting and looks unhealthy. Left alone with the plant, Seymour does not know what the plant needs. He sings about how he’s given it everything a plant could need. What more could this plant want—blood? On the word, “blood”, Audrey Two perks up, and Seymour realizes that a few drops of human blood will make Audrey Two grow... and grow... and grow (“Grow For Me”).

### **Act 1, Scene 2**

Seymour is interviewed on a radio show as a botanical genius because he has seemingly invented a new breed of plant life. Seymour reminds the listeners that Audrey Two is on display at Mushnik’s Skid Row Florists. Although he is unhappy that Seymour did not give the shop’s address, Mushnik sings about his new-found success. When Seymour returns to Skid Row with Audrey Two (who by this time is snapping at the humans), he is greeted by Chiffon, Ronnette, and Crystal who celebrate Seymour’s success (“Ya Never Know”). Audrey rushes on and apologizes to Seymour for missing the broadcast. She was handcuffed to her boyfriend. Ronnette, Chiffon, and Crystal suggest Audrey get a new man—preferably a little botanical genius. In the song, “Somewhere That’s Green,” Audrey dreams of the life that she and Seymour could have in the suburbs.

### **Act 1, Scene 3**

A week later, the flower shop is undergoing a major renovation (“Closed for Renovation”). Because Audrey Two has been attracting a lot of customers, Mushnik, Seymour and Audrey are making much needed improvements to the store. Audrey Two is now five feet tall with spiked leaves. After the song, Mushnik asks Seymour about a very important funeral account. When Seymour admits that he’s forgotten about it, Mushnik yells at him and storms off. Audrey tells Seymour that she thinks Mushnik’s too hard on him. Seymour feels he owes Mushnik for getting him out of the Skid Row Home for Boys. Audrey thinks Seymour should raise his expectations and offers to take him shopping for new clothes. Surprised that Audrey wants to be seen in public with him, Seymour asks if she’s free that night. Unfortunately, Audrey has a date.

On the street, ORIN SCRIVELLO, in a black leather jacket, asks Crystal, Ronnette, and Chiffon where the flower shop is, so he can pick up his date. Realizing that Orin gave Audrey her black eye, the girls descend on Orin and beat him up. Orin offers a truce and explains that he is not a monster. Actually, his work requires a fascination with pain and suffering. He is a dentist and describes his life’s calling to cause pain and misery (“Dentist!”). Orin pops his head in Mushnik’s Skid Row Florists Shop. Amazed by Audrey Two, Orin tells Seymour that he shouldn’t stay on skid row because the plant is a ticket to something better. Audrey tries to

explain that Seymour is loyal, but Orin stifles her conversation and tells Seymour he should think about quitting Mushnik's. Orin and Audrey leave quickly with handcuffs.

Mushnik, having eavesdropped on what Orin said, returns to the shop. While Seymour worries about Audrey, Mushnik worries about losing Audrey Two if Seymour leaves. Mushnik offers to adopt Seymour as his son ("Mushnik and Son"). Happy that his luck has changed but feeling dizzy from feeding Audrey Two so much of his own blood, Seymour starts to go to get some dinner. The plant wilts, but Seymour assures it that he will feed it in a few days. Suddenly the plant speaks. "Feed me!" it says. Seymour says he has no more blood left, but the plant demands more. The plant tells Seymour that he will have fortune and success if he just feeds it. Seymour has strong reservations about killing people, but the plant reminds Seymour that a lot of people deserve to die. At this very opportune moment, Orin and Audrey return. Audrey has forgotten her sweater, and Orin slaps her around for it. Seymour and the plant reach the same conclusion—"the guy sure looks like plant food" ("Git It").

#### **Act 1, Scene 4**

Seymour finds Orin at his office and points a gun at him. Orin easily takes the gun from Seymour, wrestles him into the dentist's chair, and threatens him with the drill. Orin pulls out a container of laughing gas, complete with a gas mask and puts it on himself to get high. In a gassed-out blissful moment, Orin disappears behind the chair. Seymour realizes that he should kill Orin now while he has the opportunity, but he can not bring himself to pull the trigger. Meanwhile, Orin can not get his gas mask off and realizes that he could asphyxiate to death. After much internal ethical debate, Seymour decides not to remove Orin's gas mask. Consequently, Orin laughs himself to death ("Now (It's Just The Gas)").

#### **Act 1, Coda**

As Seymour feeds Orin's body parts to the plant, Crystal, Ronnette, and Chiffon sing about the creepy things happening in the flower shop.

#### **Act 2, Scene 1**

The sign in the flower shop window now reads "Mushnik and Son." Audrey and Mushnik busily take flower orders over the phone while Ronnette leads another customer into the store. Late for a meeting with his lawyer, Mushnik runs out as Seymour runs in after making another delivery. Audrey asks him to help her with the phone orders. Audrey and Seymour handle a deluge of phone calls from customers ("Call Back In The Morning"). When the clock hits six, Audrey and Seymour tell the callers to call back in the morning and they sit down exhausted. Seymour tells Audrey that he's been shopping for a new wardrobe and shows off his new black leather jacket to her. Speechless and overcome with emotion, Audrey runs out. Seymour, taking off the jacket, follows her outside and tells her that he just wanted to impress her. Audrey admits that she is relieved that Orin is missing. However, she feels guilty because she secretly wishes that he has met with a foul and terrible accident. Seymour tells her that she deserves a nice guy, but Audrey says she only meets creeps in the Gutter, a nightclub where she works in cheap and tasteless outfits. Seymour sees the girl underneath the makeup and he vows to be her friend ("Suddenly Seymour"). Joining in the song, Audrey hopes Seymour will help her find the girl inside her. After their duet, Seymour and Audrey embrace passionately, but Mushnik walks in on them. Staring at Seymour, Mushnik ominously asks Audrey if she'd like to visit her dentist friend. Seymour reminds Mushnik that Orin disappeared, and sends Audrey home. When Audrey is gone, Mushnik notices little red dots on the floor. Seymour says he spilled punch. Mushnik says he was called to the police station because a Mushnik's shopping bag was found in Orin's office. Then, going through the trash (which is only collected once a month), Mushnik finds a dentist's uniform. As the plant begins to sing, Mushnik accuses Seymour of killing the dentist in order to get his girl. Seymour maintains his innocence until Mushnik shows him a picture of his baseball cap that was found in Orin's office. Seymour agrees to go to the police station with Mushnik, but

tells Mushnik that he forgot the combination to the safe and left the day's receipts in the plant. As Ronnette, Chiffon, and Crystal sing, Mushnik knocks on the plant. The plant opens wide, lets Mushnik in, traps him inside, and starts to chew ("Supertime").

### **Act 2, Scene 2**

As Seymour leaves the flower shop, Ronnette, Chiffon, and Crystal accost him like squealing teenage fans. They tell Seymour that another Uptown big shot is looking for him. Offers are coming in fast and furious as BERNSTEIN from NBC offers Seymour his own show, MRS. LUCE offers Seymour a magazine cover and an AGENT offers him a lecturing tour. Realizing that his success will come with more killing, Seymour decides to kill the plant. However, he thinks of lovely Audrey who might not like him without his plant. Determined to keep Audrey, Seymour takes the offers as the girls remind us that the meek always get what's coming to them ("The Meek Shall Inherit").

### **Act 2, Scene 3**

The plant, now taking up most of the stage, demands to be fed. Busy writing his lecture tour speech, Seymour promises that after they are photographed for Life Magazine, it will never be hungry again. The plant continues to demand food, and Seymour becomes hysterical. Audrey comes in and worries that the stress of running the shop is getting to Seymour. She asks when Mr. Mushnik will return. Seymour reminds her that he is visiting his sister in Czechoslovakia and will be gone a long time. Seymour then asks Audrey if she would still like him without Audrey Two. Audrey admits that she'd still love him. Hearing this, Seymour decides to kill the plant after Life Magazine takes their picture; then Seymour and Audrey would have the suburban life together they always dreamed of. Audrey can not understand what Seymour is talking about. Assuring her that he will explain everything, he sends her home.

The clock strikes midnight and the plant continues to demand food. Seymour offers to get it a pound of rare roast beef. The plant, seeing Audrey return, agrees. Seymour leaves. Unable to sleep, Audrey needs to talk to Seymour. In a reprise of "Supertime," the plant calls to Audrey who is surprised that it can talk. The plant tells her that it needs to be watered. When Audrey comes close to it with the watering can, the plant grabs her. Starting to eat her, the plant tells her to relax because she'll soon be with Mushnik and Orin. Seymour charges in and pulls Audrey out of the plant. Weak and dying, Audrey asks Seymour about Mushnik and Orin. Seymour admits that he had fed them to the plant. Audrey tells Seymour to feed her dead body to the plant, so that the plant will bring him all the wonderful things he deserves. Seymour refuses, but Audrey convinces him that if she's inside the plant, they will always be together. She sings a reprise of "Somewhere That's Green" and dies in Seymour's arms. As the music swells and the sunset goes nuts, Seymour feeds Audrey's body to Audrey Two.

PATRICK MARTIN from World Botanical Enterprises finds Seymour shattered by Audrey's demise. Martin wants to take leaf cuttings from Audrey Two and sell them to every florist in America. Pretty soon, every household in America will have its own Audrey II. Martin goes back to his truck to get some flowerpots. Seymour realizes that the plant has been planning world conquest all along. The plant tells Seymour that it is too late to stop it. Seymour pulls out a gun and shoots the plant. The plant laughs. Seymour forces the plant to eat rat poison. The plant just spits it out. Seymour grabs a machete and climbs into the plant. The plant closes in on him and spits out the machete. Martin returns with pruning shears and flowerpots. Ronnette, Chiffon, and Crystal take clippings of the plant and describe how the plants ate Cleveland, Des Moines, Peoria, New York, and this theatre. Audrey Two grows larger as the faces of Seymour, Mushnik, Audrey, and Orin appear in the plant's flowers. The faces warn the audience not to feed the plants ("Don't Feed The Plants"). As the company continues to warn the audience not to feed the plants, vines come down over the audience's head, and the plant engulfs the theatre. Lights go to black as the audience is eaten.

## Scenes & Songs

### **Act I**

- Prologue/Little Shop of Horrors - Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette

Scene One:

- Skid Row (Downtown) - Company
- Da-Doo - Seymour, Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette
- Grow for Me - Seymour

Scene Two:

- Ya Never Know - Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette, Seymour
- Somewhere That's Green - Audrey

Scene Three:

- Closed for Renovation - Seymour, Audrey, Mushnik
- Dentist! - Orin, Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette
- Mushnik & Son - Mushnik, Seymour
- Feed Me (Git It) - Audrey II, Seymour

Scene Four:

- Now (It's Just the Gas) - Orin, Seymour

Coda:

- Act I Finale - Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette, Audrey II

### **Act II**

Scene One:

- Call Back in the Morning - Seymour, Audrey
- Suddenly, Seymour - Seymour, Audrey
- Suppertime - Audrey II

Scene Two:

- The Meek Shall Inherit - Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette, Mr. Bernstein, Mrs. Luce, Skip Snip, Seymour,

Scene Three:

- Somnifex/Suppertime (Reprise) - Audrey, Audrey II
- Somewhere That's Green (Reprise) - Audrey
- Finale Ultimo (Don't Feed the Plants) - Company

## SHOW QUOTES

**Seymour:** The guy sure looks like plant food to me.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Audrey:** Seymour's first radio broadcast! I wanted to hear it so bad. I tried to be on time, but...

**Mr. Mushnik:** Don't tell me. You got tied up.

**Audrey:** No. Just handcuffed a little.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Seymour:** Wait for me, Audrey. This is between me and the vegetable!

\* \* \* \* \*

**Audrey:** [*singing about her dream home with Seymour*] Between our frozen dinners, and our bedtime - 9:15 - we'd snuggle watching Lucy on a big, enormous, 12-inch screen!

\* \* \* \* \*

**Audrey:** [*of Orin's disappearance*] It wouldn't be terrible at all. It would be a miracle, not to mention the money I'd save on epsom salts and ace bandages.

**MUSICAL: A CACTUS OWNS 'LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS'****By MEL GUSSOW    Published: May 30, 1982, Sunday – New York Times**

"Little Shop of Horrors," at the WPA Theater, drawn from a low budget 1960 horror movie by Roger Corman, is a Faustian musical about a timid clerk who sells his soul to a man-eating cactus. Admittedly this is rather a rarefied idea for a musical comedy, but the evening is as entertaining as it is exotic. It is a show for horticulturists, horror-cultists, sci-fi fans and anyone with a taste for the outrageous.

The evening, with score by Alan Menken and book and lyrics by Howard Ashman, begins as a kind of New York slum version of "The Little Shop Around the Corner," but before it has gone halfway round that sentimental corner, it has turned into "The Invasion of the Body Snatchers."

The show's hero (Lee Wilkof) shyly pines for a waif (Ellen Greene), his fellow flower seller for a Skid Row flower shop (a nice floral design by Edward T. Gianfrancesco). He finds a way to her heart and to success with the discovery of a bizarre new plant. The plant is green and toothy - a cross between an avocado and a shark. Placed in the window, it quickly becomes a tourist attraction, which proves that the world will beat a path to your door if you invent a better flytrap.

Existing on a diet of human blood - in a pinch it tries rare roast beef from the deli - the plant grows larger and larger until it is a monstrous mutant. This is a singing Thing, a pistil-packing vampire. It is also a scene-stealer, finally hogging the entire stage and threatening the audience.

As the gardener of the super tuber, Mr. Wilkof has an affable, offhanded manner that allows him to get away with grotesque activities such as homicide, and Miss Greene is sweetly guileless as his self-sacrificing love. Franc Luz plays a villainous dentist with a swaggering air of self-mockery. There are engaging performances by Michael Vale as the well-meaning proprietor of the shop, and by a backup trio of urchins (Leilani Jones, Jennifer Leigh Warren and Sheila Kay Davis), who view the strange events with more amusement than alarm.

The score, played by a small combo led by the composer as pianist, is a spicy blend of rock, pop and Latin. The lyrics, a step down from the music, have an appropriate simplicity. Mr. Menken and Mr. Ashman collaborated on the musical version of Kurt Vonnegut's "God Bless You Mr. Rosewater" (also at the WPA), and their new show shares some of the same cynical sensibility.

In "Little Shop of Horrors" there is even a late-blooming attempt at a message - or Flowergram - in the finale entitled "Don't Feed the Plants." One could approach the evening as a hothouse version of "Dr. Strangelove" or "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Plant," but that would be taking it much too seriously. As intended, this is a fiendish musical creature feature.

**THEATER REVIEW: A Hungry Actor? Audrey II Is Back****By BEN BRANTLEY    Published: October 3, 2003, Friday – New York Times**

An open letter to Audrey II, the people-eating plant in the revival of the musical "Little Shop of Horrors," which opened last night at the Virginia Theater:

Dear Diva:

You're still hungry, aren't you, you insatiable vixen? It wasn't enough that you starred in a creepy 1960 cult flick, then went on to wow 'em in the Off Broadway musical adaptation in 1982, and then quickly proceeded to the movie version of the musical, where you got to munch on Hollywood big shots like Steve Martin. Oh, no, you had to have Broadway at your feet, too, like Nicole and Glenn. Well, I saw you at the Virginia, baby, and, yes, you're bigger than ever. But some time when it's quiet between shows, Audrey II, take a look at that green face of yours in the mirror and ask yourself what's missing. Try to figure out just what you left behind you when you took the steep road to the Great White Way.

Sincerely,

Someone who knew you when

In the desperate, tourist-courting world of cultural appropriation on Broadway -- which has given us such stillborn aberrations as "Saturday Night Fever," the revised "Rocky Horror Show" and the mid-1990's version of "Grease" -- the new "Little Shop of Horrors" does not rank as a major offender. Directed with silky efficiency by Jerry Zaks, the show is, in word and song, honorably true to the smaller Off Broadway incarnation that became the sleeper of the season 21 years ago.

The urge to go for the glitz has, for once, been kept in check in this retelling of the story of a florist's nerdy assistant who befriends an exotic plant of carnivorous appetites. Howard Ashman's droll, cliché-bending book and lyrics -- inspired by the engagingly grisly Roger Corman movie of the same title -- remain in place. ("You don't meet nice boys on Skid Row, Mr. Mushnik," says the show's trumpy but wide-eyed heroine.) So does the gleeful 1960's-pastiche score by Alan Menken, which still sneaks into the back of your head and stays there.

There is also an array of personable, professional young talent on display, headed by Hunter Foster, Kerry Butler and Douglas Sills. And the show's leading plant, Audrey II, a puppet created by the Jim Henson Company and Martin P. Robinson, does get to, uh, stretch itself in new ways.

The overall effect is, if not exactly pleasurable, then pleasant. Which is kind of an odd word to apply to a show that features a dentist wearing black leather who extols the joys of inflicting pain, and a first-act finale in which the most notable props are the bloody, dripping parts of a dismembered body.

As an exercise in recycling, which now seems to be the principal industry among Broadway producers, this "Little Shop" suggests the conversion of sharp, shiny tin into something closer to Teflon. The 1982 version (first seen at the WPA Theater before settling into a long run at the Orpheum in the East Village) had a gritty, purely urban insolence that celebrated B-movie pulpiness and the gutsy, jive-flavored pop of an earlier time.

The show's young creators and principal performers would have been kids when Mr. Corman's quickie 1960 film (which featured a young Jack Nicholson) came out and when groups like the Shirelles and the Ronettes were topping the charts with doo-wop ballads of love and heartbreak. The musical had the double-edged savviness that comes from people's remembering the songs and movies that flavored their childhoods with equal parts affection and sardonic distance.

It was a show that knew that to make fun of something is not necessarily to dismiss it. And the cast, led by Lee Wilkof and the sublime Ellen Greene as the young lovers in jeopardy, brought a visceral affinity to the material that made it something more than camp. (You can sense the same dynamic at work today in "Avenue Q," the witty musical homage to "Sesame Street.") It was a pleasant surprise when Frank Oz's 1986 film adaptation, which paired Ms. Greene with Rick Moranis, held on to that essential quality of admiring archness.

For the current "Little Shop," the show's edges have been sanded to a smooth finish that never pricks, nicks or otherwise stimulates. As re-envisioned by the designer Scott Pask, the production's setting on Skid Row, U.S.A., makes cobwebs look clean and bloodstains benignly picturesque. It's the same aesthetic that pervades the Haunted Mansion ride at Disney World.

Orchestrated by Danny Troob, with new arrangements by Michael Kosarin, this "Little Shop" begins with an overamplified, Grand Guignol blast of rock-'n'-roll-style scare music to churn up the audience, while the blood-red oversize letters spelling out the show's title glow from the drop curtain. The feeling is of an overture to a Halloween children's party, a promise of fangs without bite.

Except for the menacing activities of Audrey II, whose soulful bass voice is provided by Michael-Leon Wooley, this curtain-raiser is pretty much the high point of crowd-teasing thrills. The cast members all have agreeable voices and synthetically precise comic timing, and they don't try to oversell themselves, a rarity in Broadway musicals these days.

But in truth, a bit more vulgarity might be welcome. Aside from Mr. Sills, who enjoys himself lustily in a variety of supporting parts, the performers don't bring much oomph or original

eccentricity to their roles. As Seymour, the grown-up orphan boy who works in the derelict flower shop of Mr. Mushnik (Rob Bartlett, known for Don Imus's radio show), Mr. Foster disappointingly finds no equivalent for the smart, stylized work he provided as the juvenile lead of "Urinetown."

As his love interest and co-worker, Audrey (Audrey II is named for her), the appealing Ms. Butler (late of "Hairspray") is a sugary wisp of a woman, with none of the lumpy, endearing whorishness that Ms. Greene brought to the part. With both Ms. Butler and Mr. Foster, you're always aware of the clean-cut winners who are portraying these smudged, bruised losers.

Their voices and their smiles sparkle. But to put over the songs of "Little Shop," you have to get at least a little dirty, to convey why the music that's parodied here felt dangerous to parents in the Eisenhower era. Few of this version's performers show any natural affinity for the hook-driven, soul-inflected style spoofed in such infectiously melodic terms by Ashman (who died in 1991) and Mr. Menken, who went on to collaborate on the delightful scores for the animated Disney movies "Little Mermaid" and "Beauty and The Beast."

Even the trio of street urchins (DeQuina Moore, Trisha Jeffrey and Carla J. Hargrove) who function as a Phil Spector-style Greek chorus fail to capture the sexy, close-harmony earnestness of the pop hits that inspired their songs. It is possible to summon that era's style without having lived through it. Just check out the young ensemble of "Hairspray" if you have any doubts.

Only Mr. Sills, best known for the title role in the ill-fated "Scarlet Pimpernel," regularly breaks through the enveloping skin of blandness. He brings an appropriately toothy, hard-smiling zest to the role of Audrey's abusive boyfriend, the dentist. If he doesn't make you forget Steve Martin's virtuosic rendering of the role in the movie, Mr. Sills still manages to redefine that part on his own happy-go-lucky terms.

But it is Audrey II that the audience most warms to. Embodied by a series of puppets, which grow larger and larger as it consumes more and more of the cast of characters, this plant sets a new standard for monstrous egos on Broadway. It may indeed turn out to be the perfect matinee idol for theatergoers who, like so many Americans, prefer their treats to be supersized.

### **TALKIN' BROADWAY'S - BROADWAY REVIEWS** **Theatre Review by Matthew Murray - October 2, 2003**

It's a pleasure to be able to report that the Broadway premiere of *Little Shop of Horrors* - the hit 1982 musical version of the 1960 Roger Corman film - has undergone few script and score changes; this is almost exactly the same script and score that made the Off-Broadway production and countless others all over the world audience-pleasing hits. And it would be a joy to be able to say that experienced Broadway director Jerry Zaks has lived up to the challenge of that material and helmed this production to sublime comic and musical perfection. That's simply not the case.

The show's inherent heart and plaintive charms have been eviscerated, and the remnants let loose at the Virginia Theatre to plant themselves down for what is likely to be, regardless, a long stay. It's important to note, though, that no production of the show, however misguided, can completely smother the show's foundational sweetness or its killer story, and this production is no exception.

The story of nebbishy Seymour Krelbourn, who discovers a new breed of plant with a taste for human blood, can't help but play. Anyone can relate to Seymour's troubled background, longing to be more than he is, and his yearning desire for his lovely co-worker Audrey, who's stuck in a violent relationship with a self-destructive dentist. But aside from those textual basics, this is a cold and forlorn production. Zaks - who took over the show after a reportedly disastrous Florida tryout that saw most of its original cast and creative team depart - has done some admirable work, but not solved the show's most pressing problem: how to make this quintessentially Off-Broadway musical fly on the Great White Way.

His primary solution, to fill the stage from floor to flies with Scott Pask's eye-popping sets - foreboding vistas of downtown squalor and ominous thunderclouds - was a good step, but it shouldn't have been the only one. Far more serious is that the show requires no more than - and flourishes with - a tiny cast (traditionally nine, here expanded to twelve), and that the Howard Ashman and Alan Menken score and Ashman book, while undeniably modern classics, are made up completely of the smallest big jokes and most restrained showstoppers imaginable.

They can all be deliriously delightful in the right environment, though none is capable of quite filling the large and often unforgiving Virginia. Danny Troob's hearty new orchestrations for Henry Aronson's rollicking, Broadway-sized band give the music as much breadth as possible, but while Donald Holder's sometimes overly hyperactive lights help Zaks make the smaller numbers bigger, they don't do much for the bigger songs. Choreographer Kathleen Marshall's underpowered dances also provide little assistance.

The performers - save one - don't find much size in their roles to fill the gaps. That exception is Rob Bartlett's Mushnik, physically imposing and able to span the distance from the stage to the mezzanine with a glare, an arched eyebrow, or a raised hand; he has little time onstage overall, but makes the most of it. Douglas Sills is funnier in his numerous small character roles than in his larger one as the nitrous oxide-sucking dentist; he doesn't find all the comedy possible, but he does well enough. So do Carla J. Hargrove, Trisha Jeffrey, and DeQuina Moore as the Greek chorus of three street urchins who belt out the show's most infectious tunes in finely matched close harmony.

The two central roles are more problematic. Kerry Butler misses most of Audrey's laughs and touches on only the outermost boundaries of her heart, but her performance has charm and is at least moderately affecting. And her singing (if not always her lower-class New York accent) is dynamite. Hunter Foster, a semi-hunky leading man type, is right for Seymour vocally but in no other way; he has far too much faith in himself, and his obviously affected whiny voice tends to grate after a while. His Seymour is never a man torn between fame, love, and destruction. Unsurprisingly, when Butler and Foster come together for their big duet - "Suddenly Seymour," one of the show's most enduring songs - they raise the rafters but can't fall in love. Neither can we.

As is so often the case, Seymour's plant Audrey II is this production's most vibrant star. Its voice is provided with amply booming bass-baritone effectiveness by Michael-Leon Wooley, but it's Martin P. Robinson who steals the show. The designer and manipulator of the original production's series of Audrey IIs, Robinson has returned to design (with the Jim Henson Company) and operate (with assistants Anthony Asbury, Bill Remington, and Matt Vogel) them again. These Audrey IIs provide the most dynamic and viscerally effective puppetry Broadway has seen in ages. You never have to worry about these puppets getting lost in a big house.

It's in watching the flawless synchronization between Robinson and Wooley that you realize how Broadway professionalism can get certain things tremendously right even while getting others very wrong; if I didn't know the plant wasn't actually speaking, I wouldn't be able to tell. They're all that good. Of course, even Robinson and his cohorts aren't completely immune to this production's problematic aura: During the show's final (and only truly stage-filling) number, Robinson takes Audrey II for one final, cataclysmic, blood hunt. But though the entire cast gives that number the evening's most fulfilling performance, when the number reaches its musical and dramatic climax, Robinson and Audrey II let the audience off easy, and pull back.

I guess they, like the rest of this *Little Shop of Horrors*, just weren't quite bloodthirsty enough.

**London Theatre Guide - Published 01 Dec 2006**  
**The First Night Feature: Little Shop Of Horrors**

As productions of *Jack And The Beanstalk* bring smiles to the faces of impressionable children across the country, it is an overgrown plant of a different size lightening the mood in horrific fashion at the Menier Chocolate Factory. This one doesn't reach up to a giant's wonderland in the sky; rather it sings, dances and has an insatiable taste for human blood. Matthew Amer attended the press night of *Little Shop Of Horrors*.

*Little Shop* has a lot to live up to. At the Menier it follows hits like *Sunday In The Park With George* and *Tick, Tick, Boom*. But the cast don't let this pressure get to them, they simply doo wop their way through the pulp fiction, comic horror show with energy and a natural comedy.

Seymour is an orphan looked after/used as a slave by Mushnik, who owns a failing florist on Skid Row. His lack of friends means he has lots of time to spend with the plants, and one in particular, the 'strange and interesting' Audrey II. Of course, Audrey II is no ordinary plant, it needs human blood to survive. When it's just a sapling this is no problem; it opens its mouth – if that is what it is called – like a baby bird, and a few finger pricks later, everybody's happy. But as it grows – and grow it most certainly does – it needs more blood to feed its needs.

Matthew White's production has humour everywhere, from Howard Ashman's lyrics to Lynne Page's choreography, which includes slow motion fighting and complete loss of bodily control. Multi award-winning designer David Farley (*Sunday In The Park With George*) provides a set that humbly evokes a scummy Skid Row, and the team behind Audrey II have produced a monster of a plant, to which Canadian comedian Mike McShane lends his variety of vocal talents.

There's a real ease to the comic performances of the cast. Sheridan Smith, who is best known for her television comedy roles, delivers a ditzy, naïve Audrey – Mushnik's shop assistant and Seymour's secret crush – managing to balance the most comic lines with a touching sadness. Barry James's Mushnik is a mumbling, crabby old man, out for everything he can get, while Paul Keating plays Seymour with a wide-eyed innocence, even when feeding body parts to a hungry six-foot shrub. Jasper Britton, who plays psychotic dentist Orin Scrivello and a host of other parts, imbues his main part with an eccentric madness while reining it in again elsewhere.

Possibly the most surprising performance of the night comes not from the leads, but from the chorus of Katie Kerr, Melitsa Nicola and Jenny Fitzpatrick, who turn up at windows and doors, or out on the street, at the most opportune moments, to narrate, comment, or provide some sharp backing vocals.

Little Shop Of Horrors: it's the only show this Christmas where the evil giant is the beanstalk, and boasts more evil cackling per square inch than most of London's pantos.

<http://www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk/news/display?contentId=91929>

**Little Shop of Horrors - Theatre.com, UK Limited. - by Mark Shenton**

When this sparkling, smashing revival of the cult 1982 off-Broadway hit *Little Shop of Horrors* originated at Southwark's Menier Chocolate Factory last year, I previously reported that, "There are obviously hopes for the production to have a further and extended life elsewhere; but if so, it will be important to sustain the sense of wonder and excitement that it achieves here."

The good news is that it does both in the move to the Duke of York's, where it introduces a different kind of rock 'n' roll to the kind recently being offered on this same stage by Tom Stoppard. While Stoppard's *Rock 'N' Roll*, of course, celebrated (amongst others) the famous Czech band The Plastic People of the Universe, this is a musical about a plastic plant with global ambitions. But there the similarities between the two shows end.

However, it does share affinities with another show on the same street: like *Avenue Q* at the Coward Theatre just up St Martin's Lane, this is also an off-Broadway originated musical that revolves around puppets. But whereas *Avenue Q* brilliantly humanizes a set of glove puppets

attached to the arms of actors as visible extensions of them, *Little Shop* has a more sinister satirical purpose, one in which you can't see who's pulling the strings—or chomping the body parts. This is a plant that takes on a life of its own—which involves claiming lives of its own. The musical, too, has long staked a claim to its own immortality. But there's nothing that can kill a joke like this stone-dead like an over-arching sense of its own knowingness, and it's one that Matthew White's production comes perilously close to flirting with at times. As at the Menier, the aggressively in-her-face performances of the Greek-style chorus of girls—Ronette, Chiffon and Crystal—sometimes make it seem like they've been overdosing on the crystal meth on Skid Row. Less, girls, less!

They have a brilliant role model to learn from: Sheridan Smith is entirely captivating as Audrey. A bit like Broadway's Kristin Chenoweth with added charm, she's vulnerable, funny, sexy and sensational. There isn't a more charming musical theatre performance in town.

Nor, in the production's major cast change since the Menier, is there a funnier performance around than Alistair McGowan's assumption of the role of dentist Orin Scrivello—and a fast-changing selection of others—who brings a (pre-downfall) Michael Barrymore-like quality of cheeky-chappie charm to the stage.

Paul Keating's Seymour is a flurry of goofy, antic physicality, while Barry James has, by contrast, usefully toned down his act as Mushnik.

The plant, meanwhile, continues to exert its manic, ever-growing hold on the stage, and though I worried that it might look a little smaller on the Duke of York's stage than it did in the close-up quarters of the Menier, it is still a formidable object: as I previously described it, it's as if Kermit the Frog has been morphed into a dragon-winged mushroom head with teeth.

And *Little Shop* remains a musical with a bite every bit as loud as its bark.

## **BROADWAYWORLD.COM – UK REVIEW**

**Wednesday, December 6, 2006; Posted: 12:59 PM - by Jake Brunger**

Sometimes theatre gives us those great, enjoyable nights demanding nothing of the audience; it doesn't claim to be intellectually stimulating, ground-breaking or life-changing, but a harmless piece of escapism with the promise of two hours of fun. *Little Shop of Horrors* is one of those shows. Camp, silly and catchy, the Menier's revival is definitely a refreshing break from the barrage of blockbuster musicals currently playing in the West End, and even manages to surpass them for entertainment value.

But then how can you go wrong? The story is quite ridiculous, but great fun too. When flower shop owner Mr. Mushnik (Barry James) is forced to close his business, shop assistant Seymour (Paul Keating) steps in with a solution – an intriguingly odd new plant that's bound to attract attention. With crowds flocking to the shop, Seymour discovers the only way the plant will survive is to feed it with fresh blood. How can he woo the attractive assistant Audrey (Sheridan Smith) and fend off her violent boyfriend Orin (Jasper Britton)? Well, in all manner of silly ways, as the plot absurdly unfolds.

*Little Shop of Horrors* runs the risk of being amateurishly parodied, but with Matthew White's excellent direction, it's played with a perfect balance of self-knowing humour, but never goes too far. David Farley's long set, played right across the space, conjures up images from that other downtown quirky hit *Avenue Q* – all brick walls and smashed windows. The shop slides on cleverly, unfolding to reveal its interior. It looks vaguely amateurish, but that's sort of part of its charm. Audrey II, the plant which grows to fill the shop, is perhaps not given the most inventive of creative interpretations – it's a fairly standard puppet plant – but it still delights in its comic ability.

Sheridan Smith, as Audrey, is fantastic; constantly threatening to burst out of her tiny dress (which is comically alluded to), she brings a great deal of depth to the role – she is, after all,

being beaten by her boyfriend. Her rendition of “Somewhere That’s Green” moves her to tears, a very emotional performance, but she’s also very funny, too (TV viewers will recognize her from cult comedies *The Royle Family* and *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*). Her occasional giggles and shy, off-the-cuff looks at Seymour are priceless. An excellent performance.

Paul Keating ditches the generic geeky portrayal of Seymour (as played by Rick Moranis in the film) and puts on a much more shy, nervous character, but leaves enough charm to woo Audrey and win over her heart. Like Sheridan Smith, he manages to offer a glimpse of the trauma he’s under despite the otherwise pantomimic nature of the show. Barry James – the original London Seymour – successfully graduates to the role of Mushnik, whilst Mike McShane voices Audrey II with a humorous, well-pitched voice. Jasper Britton is a very menacing Orin, as well he should be as an abusive boyfriend.

But the surprise stars of the show are Katie Kerr, Melitsa Nicol and Jenny Fitzpatrick as the trio of urchins who roam the streets and offer a musical commentary on the show. They give absolutely hilarious performances, especially Kerr - straight out of drama school - who shows great promise to be a rising comic performer. Opening the show with the catchy prologue (‘Little Shop of Horrors’), they remind us just how excellent Alan Menken’s score is whilst making some laugh-out-loud facial expressions to match.

So whilst there’s no demanding story or morals to be learnt, this really is a great night out; very funny, suitable for all ages and the Menier offers a tremendously intimate atmosphere. All in all, it feels like the kind of show your best friends have thrown together to cheer you up on a rainy day, and that’s by no means a bad thing – you feel completely at ease. It runs until February, and I wouldn’t be surprised if it gets snapped up for a limited West End run, so catch it at the Menier whilst you can.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Turning points are key moments in our lives or in the lives of characters in dramas. A turning point changes the course of our lives forever. What are the key turning points for the characters of *Little Shop of Horrors*?
2. Did any of the characters change or grow in the course of *Little Shop of Horrors*? Try to identify the specific moments of change.
3. With which character did you sympathize most? Why?
4. Did you recognize anything that reminded you of yourself in any of the characters?
5. What does the title of the show tell you about the characters? If you had to think of a different title for this piece, what would it be?
6. What is satire? In what ways does *Little Shop of Horrors* satirize science fiction? In what ways does *Little Shop of Horrors* satirize conventional musical comedies?
7. *Little Shop of Horrors* satirizes the Faust legend. Read the story of *Faust*. In what other musical styles has the story been told? Listen to the opera *Faust* and read and listen to *Damn Yankees*. In what ways does *Little Shop of Horrors* satirize *Faust*?
8. *Little Shop of Horrors* satirizes the conventions of “B” movies. What are “B” movies? What are some other “B” movies? What do they often seem to have in common? In what ways does *Little Shop of Horrors* satirize them?
9. The Urchins – Ronnette, Chiffon, and Crystal – are considered the Greek Chorus of the show. A Chorus in Greek tragedy comments on the story and makes things happen within the story. How do The Urchins do this? How do they set up the world of the play? How do they move the story along? What are they doing at the end of the play? Have they changed in any way from the beginning?
10. Why is Orin a dentist? Why did he become a dentist? Describe your own dentist experiences. Are they scary? How does your dentist make the experience less scary?
11. In your own words describe a monster. Who is the monster in *Little Shop of Horrors*? Why? Is there more than one monster in the show? What is the difference between a good monster and a bad monster?
12. Why does Seymour feed Mushnik to the plant? Why doesn't Seymour kill the plant after it eats Mushnik? What sacrifice does Seymour make by allowing the plant to live?
13. In the song, “The Meek Shall Inherit,” Seymour chooses to keep the plant alive. However, later in the musical, he must live with the consequences of his choice when Audrey dies. What other choices does Seymour make in the musical? Are there any situations where he had no choice?
14. How are songs in musicals different from pop songs (songs you listen to on the radio or CD)? How are they the same? What other musicals use popular song form?
15. Does the music place *Little Shop of Horrors* in any specific time period? Are there any examples in *Little Shop of Horrors* where you felt that you had heard the music (or similar music) before?
16. Listen to music by The Supremes, James Brown, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, and Jim Morrison. Compare the music in the show with music by the show's influences. What qualities do the two share? How is the music in the show different? **Trivia:** *the three urchins Ronnette, Chiffon, and Crystal were named after the singing groups The Ronnettes, The Chiffons, and The Crystals.*
17. It is interesting to note that the movie musical by the same name went with an alternate, more upbeat ending because of test audiences' dislike of the ending that was filmed according to the stage version. So, in order to make the movie more popular and more marketable, the producers had to change an important part of the whole plot. Do you think this spoils the story? Watch the movie musical and decide for yourself which ending you prefer.