

REVIEW: Little Shop of Horrors— music and murder aplenty

Brampton Guardian

BRAMPTON— If you have an appetite for ridiculous and fun theatre, the Rose Theatre's main stage presentation of Little Shop of Horrors serves it up aplenty.

But— it's not for everyone.

The musical, based on the 1960 cult classic film of the same name, is part comedy, part horror and wholly bizarre with its mix of murderous vegetation, 1950s music and budding romance.

In order to enjoy this musical for what it is— darkly funny and absurdly quirky— you have to abandon all expectations of a story that is realistic or serious. Unless, that is, you believe in animated, blood-thirsty, man-eating plants.

The story starts when Mr. Mushnik (Mark Llewellyn) decides to close down his Skid Row flower shop after a day without an entire customer. The ditzy but beautiful Audrey (Tess Bengier), an employee of the shop, pleads with the owner to let nerdy co-worker Seymour (Jeremy Lapalme) put his unusual botanical discovery on display to attract customers — which it does.

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But when Seymour learns the plant— which he names Audrey II as an ode to his love for the kind-hearted blonde— requires a “special” diet to flourish, the geek-turned-botanical celebrity faces a moral dilemma.

The highlight of two-act musical is unequivocally the music— and the three chorus girls that in part narrate the story for the audience. Switching from rock 'n' roll to R&B to Motown, the music (composed by Alan Menkin) is smart, witty and catchy.

Chorus girls Ronette (Saccha Dennis), Crystal (Kate Etienne) and Chiffon (Stephanie Wilson) have the musical chops to keep the audience planted in their seats. Their vocals are strong and lush, and give this production the element it needs to make it a worthwhile tongue-in-cheek adventure.

Casting for this show was smartly executed, and Jeremy Lapalme as Seymour is exactly the right fit— Lapalme brings the right amount of awkward nerd factor to the stage, and even in the throes of Seymour's questionable ethics, his character garners empathy and easily has the audience rooting for him. Tess Bengier as Audrey is an absolute delight to watch. Mark Llewellyn, who is no stranger to the Rose Theatre stage, also gives a solid performance as Mr. Mushnik.

But it is Jay Davis who really impresses, when he demonstrates his range of talent with eight different roles in the production — the highlights being the sadistic dentist Orin Scrivello, and his portrayal of Mrs. Luce.

It wouldn't be fair to leave out John Campbell and Sophia Fabilli— even though they are mostly behind the scenes they are integral to making Audrey II come to life (and also take a few) on stage.

That said, a faster pace in places might have helped keep the momentum going— there are a few scenes that seem unnecessary or too slow and break the show's stride.

But, if you're in the mood for a quirky, funny and even peculiar production with excellent music and outstanding vocals, pick up a ticket for Little Shop of Horrors. But remember, don't feed the plants.

Little Shop of Horrors runs until Aug. 2 at the Rose Theatre. Tickets start at \$32. For more, visit www.rosetheatre.ca (<http://www.rosetheatre.ca>) or call 905-874-2800.

