

Written by Thom White
Monday, 04 June 2012 06:00

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Pink and Green Mother from Outer Space: "Little Shop of Horrors," at the Clinton Area Showboat Theatre

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And then there's the plant, Audrey II. The pod's first incarnation – as a smallish bud in a normal-sized houseplant pot – is eye-catching for its mix of shimmering, metallic green with pink trim. But while this look (which is either an inspiration of costume designer Dusty Shaffer or Riewerts or both, as the program doesn't specify) works for the smaller versions of the plant, as Audrey II increases in size, the colors and metallic sheen of the plant's "flesh" become too glamorous, taking a lot of edge off what's supposed to be a threatening creature. While I quite like that Audrey II is female in the Showboat's production – voiced with moxie and sung with amusing attitude by Nyla Watson – the pink-yarn pigtails that further display the plant's gender are tacky and cheap-looking, and the large, pink lips in the final version are too luscious, rendering Audrey II more showgirl than murderous menace to the human race. I will say that I was impressed by the design – I liked Audrey II's color scheme, feminine characteristics, and wart-like bumps on the pod's fourth incarnation – but still didn't find the look appropriate for the character.

On top of the design issues, whether due to mechanical limitations or lack of proper training, puppeteer Cole Mitchell Rauch didn't move the final version of Audrey II's mouth in sync with Watson's deliveries during Friday's performance. Standing inside Audrey II, Rauch pretty much just opens and shuts the plant's mouth while speaking or singing, with seemingly no attempt to match the movements with the words. The effect is so distracting that it breaks the illusion of the plant being sentient, which kind of ruins the show, or at least derails it.

All is not lost, though. The street urchins continue to be the most amusing part of Riewerts' presentation, though none of their subsequent songs are as much fun as their opening number. Randi Garza ignores previous incarnations of Audrey – Seymour's co-worker and love interest – by trading the squeaky-voiced-airhead routine for a more realistic woman with a consistent Brooklyn accent, and her song "Somewhere That's Green" is the most emotionally stirring of the evening's offerings. Garza starts the piece with a dreamy, happy tone, and eventually shifts to a sort of embarrassment over this silly dream, ending with a sad longing for something she seems to know she'll never have.

Anthony Sagaria's dentist is the expectedly welcome jerk of a sadist, displaying a blend of creepiness and sexiness; Shaffer dresses him in a dental-uniform shirt with the short sleeves cinched at the top, showing off his biceps, which are also highlighted in Cowing's choreography for Sagaria's song "Dentist!" And as plant-shop owner Mr. Mushnik, Rob Engelson is in his prime during his number "Mushnik & Son." As he sings of adopting Seymour, Engelson clearly portrays the entirety of his character's limitations – his greed, insincerity, and self-interest.

Still, the individual performances don't add much dimension to the Showboat's *Little Shop of Horrors*, which Menken's and Ashman's musical requires to be of interest beyond being a collection of pleasant songs and passing entertainment.

Little Shop of Horrors runs at the Clinton Area Showboat Theatre (303 Riverview Road, Clinton) through June 10, and tickets and information are available by calling (563)242-6760 or visiting [ClintonShowboat.org](http://www.ClintonShowboat.org).