



## ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

NAME OF COMPANY: TAOS

NAME OF PRODUCTION: Little Shop of Horrors

VENUE: The Arc Theatre

DATE: 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019

ADJUDICATOR: Laura Corradi Loughran

This iconic sci-fi musical has been a firm favourite amongst Amateur Dramatic companies, and with its energetic rock score it's not difficult to see why. However, where this piece falters, is the lack of material for a large ensemble, with the majority of the show resting heavily on the eight principals. Overall, you overcame this and introduced the ensemble to moments not traditionally performed as a full company, which, for the most part worked well.

### STAGING

#### ACT ONE:

'Little Shop of Horrors' as an opening number of the show introduces not only the story but the Ronette's role in the musical. It was an interesting choice to add a larger ensemble to the piece although this altered the dynamic of their part. The choreography may have been better to keep small and simple – think Andrew Sisters stylistically – to enhance the support of the vocals.

The first scene introducing Seymour, Mushnik and Audrey was excellent. The scene change opening up the shop worked well and all three actors provided recognizable and committed characterizations.

'Skid Row' opened with a strong solo although less vibrato would enhance the pop style. Choreography when the ensemble was in two groups was especially effective. It was a nice touch to have the street bum coughing and throwing the old sandwich into the shop, great comic timing.

'Grow for me' displayed good puppetry, watching the plant open and grow, with a strong vocal from Seymour.

'Don't it go to show you never know' was well conceived. Mushnik had a warm rich tone which suited his character well. The choreography between Mushnik and the Ronette's was excellent, however, I question having the ensemble come through the back in a conga line. It didn't add anything to the piece and distracted from the principal action on stage.

'Closed for Renovation' captured the business of the shop well. The throwing of the flowers was well executed. The ensemble could have brought some of the movement downstage for additional space, and although revealing the plant at the end, do ensure a finalized movement to end on the musical button. The scene to follow between Seymour and Audrey was utterly charming.

The introduction of Orin, laughing on his gas was great, we took an instant dislike to this character. During the 'Dentist!' song, Orin may have tried a little too hard to play the comedy – find the truth and the comedy reads easier and speaks for itself. A gag was perhaps missed at the end of the number – 'Now Spit' the music allows for the Ronette's to spit at him.

The scene between Orin and Audrey was excellent. Orin took pleasure in his threatening behavior and Audrey's fear was clear. Good choice of exit through auditorium with Orin chasing Audrey, it utilized your available playing space well. Next to the highlight of the Act, 'Mushnik and sons'. Both Mushnik and Seymour seemed to enjoy the humour of the number and this transcended to the audience. The vocal play by Mushnik with his Russian flourish was highly comical and he played the holding breathe gag well, with excellent timing. The Choreography played with the style and comedy of the song and I especially liked Seymour's leg flick on 'come kiss me quick' and the final lift. Seymour continued to shine delivering beautiful vocals with sincerity during the 'Somewhere that's Green' reprise section.

The voice of the plant provided character to the work of the puppeteer and together they worked with great synchronicity. Having the Ronette's on the stage left balcony during 'Feed Me' and 'Now' unfortunately caused a visual distraction. It would have been better to keep them on stage, framed in the shop window perhaps.

The Dentist drill and screaming sound effects were a good set up to the scene to follow. Having a member of the ensemble come into the waiting room with blood oozing from their mouth further added to this. Orin used vocal inflections to great effect with his line delivery and the laughing gas props were well designed.

'Now (It's just the gas)' was sang well, however when Orin was dying he could have explored a breathier tone. The action was too far downstage however as when dentist was on the floor he wasn't visible.

The final feeding of the Act to the plant was again well done.

## ACT TWO

'Call back in the morning' opened the act with strong vocals by Audrey and Seymour, just a small note that the telephone rings didn't match the timing of the music. The following scene between Audrey and Seymour was gorgeous. The relationship between them grew with sweetness and genuine care for one another.

'Suddenly Seymour' was sung beautifully, however the ensemble overpowered the soloists at the end. After the song, the ensemble exiting distracted from the kiss and action on stage, which was a shame.

'Supertime' delivered an excellent vocal by Audrey 2. Again the Ronette's on the balcony distracted from the main action on stage. Mushnik's hand sticking out of the plant to blackout was a nice touch and provided a lasting visual.

I enjoyed seeing the change in relationship between Seymour and Audrey 2. Seymour showing frustration, anger and hysteria, with Audrey 2 displaying good vocal tactics to encourage Seymour to provide more meat. I would have liked to have seen a bigger reaction from Audrey when the plant started talking to her, however the death of Audrey was played beautifully. I truly believed that she was happy to die and be attended to by Seymour. The addition of the ensemble Ah's provided added atmosphere.

The opening solo of the 'Finale (Don't feed the plants)' was strong although perhaps over embellished. Unfortunately, the soprano vocals were weak and overall there was a lack of energy from the ensemble. I enjoyed the 'Encore' with good additional movement of the plant and nice to see Audrey 2 out front singing. The dancers heightened the energy and it made for strong end. It is a number not often heard, as not licensed with the MTI script and taken from the movie. Of course most recently featuring in the Regents Park production to great success.

Overall a sound production.

#### MUSIC AND SOUND:

A reason why I enjoy reading a theatre program is because it gives information and context to the people behind the scenes. It was interesting to read that it was the Musical Directors first production in the role, and overall she did well. A note in regards to conducting – throughout, the main focus was on keeping the band in time. Little attempt was made to introduce dynamics and therefore the band sounded a little wooden. This will of course come with time and experience. The tempo of the numbers throughout the production were on the slow side, and led to a dip in energy both by the players and the performers. To help combat this, if not playing keys whilst conducting, try standing up and using the idea that you are performing too.

The soloists all had strong voices, as did the Ronette's. The ensemble produced a good sound, especially in 'Skid Row' and during the Ah's of the death of Audrey. Further work is required for the soprano line both in the Ronette's and as a fill company to ensure pitch is maintained.

Unfortunately, there were some issues with the sound on the night I attended, mainly in the levels. For example, during the opening number the soprano was much louder than the other two providing an imbalance. Levels, continued to be an issue when the ensemble joined in – the soloists were lost. During 'Suddenly Seymour' and 'Dentist' song, the mics cut in and out and there was some distortion.

#### DESIGN:

The opening of shop front worked very well to allow for maximum space on stage when required. The props and use of the stoop down stage right were effective. The puppetry was very well executed. The AV didn't add anything to the production.

Although I guess it was introduced to add height to the set, if you are going to use it as a design feature it needs to be utilized to the max.

The lighting was well designed and supported the action without being too intrusive. I would of perhaps positioned the spot which captured Audrey at the end of 'Somewhere that's green' at the top of the stoop steps.

The costumes were well designed and the Ronette's especially had costume changes in keeping with the advancement of the story – the gold dresses looked particularly fabulous.

## **CAST**

### **SEYMOUR played by Karl Montgomery –**

You delivered a performance with sincerity, playing the truth of your character rather than overplaying the comedy. You have a strong warm vocal tone, just be careful not to devoice at the end of phrases. You handled all the choreography well. A strong performer and well suited to the role. Well Done.

### **AUDREY played by Connie Knight –**

You performed this role with real heart. Seeing Audrey's confidence grow following her relationship with Orin was a joy to watch. 'Somewhere' that's Green' and 'Suddenly Seymour' was stunning. You have a strong clear tone, with a pure belt that worked extremely well in the role. Congratulations.

### **MUSHNIK played by Paul West –**

Again a great casting choice. You have a great bass tone which suited the Russian accent well in both dialogue and song. You were a lovable rogue, although we knew you were using Seymour, we liked you anyway. 'Mushnik and Sons' was sung with flair and we enjoyed watching it as much as sure you enjoyed performing it. Good work.

### **ORIN played by Ashley Watson –**

You certainly looked as though you enjoyed playing this role. What a fantastic part. You played with your vocal intonation well, voicing Orin brilliantly. At times, you overplayed the comedy a little, but the audience were on your side. You have a strong voice and moved well in character. Well Done.

### **VOICE OF AUDREY 2 played by Tim Hobbs and PUPPETEER played by Ben Jenkins –**

Excellent synchronicity between you both. Dialogue and song were delivered with character and expression, which made the movement of the plant even more believable. I enjoyed the final performance seeing Tim as the performer. A strong end to the show.

### **Ronette's –**

You worked well together, telling the story and supporting the action. Each of you had strong voices and had your moments to shine with well assigned solo's. Just be careful with pitch when all together, especially on the top notes. You all looked fabulous and danced well.

*Thank you for your warm welcome and your hospitality and I look forward to many more performances at this theatre.*