

British Theatre Guide

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Little Shop of Horrors

Book and lyrics by Howard Ashman, music by Alan Menken
Menier Chocolate Factory production
Sunderland Empire and touring
(2009)

I love *Little Shop of Horrors*, so, having heard so much about the Menier production, I was over the moon at the chance to see it on tour. I loved the set. Audrey II was wonderful, from the baby in the plant pot to the huge stage-dominating man-eater at the end. The music is still great. The cast were excellent.

But - well, there has to be a "but", doesn't there? or I wouldn't be starting a review like this - the sound was at such a level that it distorted the voices to the extent that clarity was lost, mainly in the songs but also, less so and then only occasionally, in the speech. I hope this was a first night problem, along with a few glitches in the lighting, such as a follow-spot which changed from colour to open white for no apparent reason in the middle of a song, and in some scene changes, as when, at one point in an exterior scene, someone obviously realised that the blinds of the flower shop should be closed and they hadn't been, so someone crept on, silhouetted against the window, and closed them - very distracting!

And if I'm going to be pernickety, I was a little worried by the clash of periods in the design. It's very definitely early sixties in its attitudes - the lovely song "Somewhere that's green" with its reference to Betty Crocker and Donna Reed, is so evocative of the time - and in its design the production reflects this, except that the chorus of three girl singers were dressed very "now", but their names - Chiffon, Crystal and Ronette - tells us what they should be, a girl band of the period.

But perhaps I *am* being too pernickety. It didn't spoil my enjoyment and probably 99.9% of the audience didn't notice anyway. Clare Buckfield and Damian Humbley were delightful as the two innocents, with "Suddenly Seymour" stopping the show as always: that final duet chorus rises above period pastiche to become very moving. There is strong support from Sylvester McCoy as Mushnik and Alex Ferns as the Dentist (and almost everyone else!), and the three girls (Nadia Di Mambro, Cathryn Davis and Donna Hines) as a kind of Motown Greek chorus sing powerfully and well. Special mention should be made of Mike McShane as the voice of Audrey II - a very rich and, when required, scary voice it is too!

And, of course, Audrey II is a star in "her" own right, thanks to Artem Special Effects.

Little Shop remains a great show and, in spite of the my little niggles (and the technical glitches), this production provides a night of great fun.

This production was reviewed by Philip Seager at the [Sheffield Lyceum](#) and by David Chadderton at the [Opera House, Manchester](#)

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)