LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
MIT Musical Theater Guild.
Directed by Sean P. White.
Book and lyrics by Howard Ashman.
Music by Alan Menken.
Starring Bruce Applegate '94, Kathy Conley '96, Rob Amint '92, and John de Guzman '97.

By Adam Lindsay

The Musical Theatre Guild seems to have gotten it right this time with its entertaining production of Little Shop of Horrors. Despite slight deficits apparent in most areas of the production, all of the pieces are present for a fun evening.

The musical is by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, the same team that produced the music from Little Mermaid and Beauty and the Beast. Yet a dark comedy with horror elements; the songs and much of the humor both parody and romanticize the 1950s back-drop to the horror film plot.

A loser working at a florist's, Seymour (Bruce Applegate '94) is gradually seduced into evil deeds by an animate plant's promises of fame and fortune. He allows himself to be manipulated by his talking plant until the climax of Horrors.

The Emifle

Seymour's chief foil is the greedy shopkeeper (Bob Amint '92), who is the boy's father figure, and Audrey's boyfriend (China de Guzman '97), a sadistic dentist. Amini provided his usual spark and presence in his portrayal of Mushnik, the shop-owner. His Yiddish accent, though generally convincing, sometimes slipped into Russian or otherwise unknown territory. De Guzman played Orin the dentist with organic glee. His energetic performance was over the top with puttyish facial expressions and prancing about in his character number, "(Son, Be a) Dentist!" In addition, Guzman was cast as all the other outside agents tempting Seymour with success and fortune. Providing an interesting statement about the insulated world which we examine for two hours.

Applegate acted Seymour with sufficient charm to make him the object of the audience's sympathies. Like Conley, he provided the requisite innocence of his role, and sang and moved in simplistic terms. Simultaneously, he was most plagued by balance problems with the orchestra (a perennial issue with MTG) while he was upstage. This problem did not detract much from the overall presentation.

Other than the problems of balance, the orchestra was well-led by Co-Music Director Carson Schütze G. The tight combo handled the variety of fitful-style tunes well.

The singing, especially by the female trio (who acted as the chorus, minor characters, and narrators), was solid throughout the small cast. There were very few pitch slips, and they were nearly imperceptible. The efforts of Co-Music Director, Beth Siere '95 are to be thanked for this vocal strength seldom seen in the entire ensemble of an MTG show. The ensemble was a little less accomplished in other areas of the performance. Although first-time director Sean P. White '96 had a good grasp of the basics of the show, and made most moments work, he faltered at key points in the show. Seymour's change into a confident force is weakly realized, and the following dramatic climax when Audrey is attacked by the plant and Seymour brings a screwdriver into the action is just as poorly handled. Fortunately, White makes amends with the astute direction of the plant during the epi-logue, threatening the audience by coming directly downstage, a strong move. Although the show contains "Little Shop of Horrors" as a musical tragedy in his director's note, he treats it primarily as a comedy. It is very strong and entertaining in such, but the horror elements, and music are weak. With the simplified score and situation, the show is certainly convincing as the alien type of creature it depicts. The synchronization between the animation and the voice is generally satisfactory, though sometimes spotty.

Many small imperfections mar MTG's production, though. In a particularly memorable one, a technician was visible during an attempt to control the plant. If one is inclined to ignore these flaws (and with the overall quality of the production) indeed as inclined, the show is very satisfying. The Guild wisely chose to do a relatively small, well-written musical, and with an excellent cast the result is a rewarding experience.

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