

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Jonas Cole (left) manipulates the man-eating plant, and James Stovall is the voice of Audrey II, in "Little Shop of Horrors."

2 share role of monster plant

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

Audrey II, the monstrous, people-eating plant in "Little Shop of Horrors," requires two actors — one for the voice and one to manipulate it. James Stovall, in an offstage booth, speaks and sings when the plant talks and one to manipulate it.

Jonas Cole is a wiry, 6 foot 2 actor who gets inside the plant, which eventually grows to enormous height, and its viny arms overflow the stage. He moves its huge mouth when it talks and eats. He makes the plant gyrate wildly, too.

"It's very hot in there," said Cole. "There's no air in there. The trick is trying to get something lifeless like that to look like it's talking and synchronized with the voice."

Cole has an amused twinkle in his eye as he talks about this offbeat role he plays. This is the second production in which he operated Audrey II. He did the show for more than a year in Boston, working with the same director as the Birmingham production.

"THIS IS A pliable plant. It has an aluminum frame and foam," he said, contrasting Audrey II in the current show with the one in Boston. "The other was one-quarter-inch fiberglass. You have to be very agile and

very strong. You have to lift it at parts."

He also makes the little plant move, in its first of four stages, but he won't reveal how.

Jonas has studied yoga for years and also runs, does Nautilus and workouts. He points out, "This is a workout in itself."

What makes it especially tough, "Most of the times you can't see out. Sometimes there's a screen and they can't see in, and you can see out."

His theatrical background includes working as an actor and clown and doing improvisational comedy. He did two tours of puppetry, one with a Boston troupe and another in a Japanese style called Bunraku.

Cole says there may be a Japanese tour of "Little Shop of Horrors," with him cast again as Audrey II's puppeteer.

"It's hard work, but it's nice to be employed in the acting profession," he noted.

JAMES STOVALL, Audrey II's voice, has appeared in Birmingham once before, singing in a church with a choral group from his college, Morehouse, in Atlanta. This time, he's behind the scenes as Audrey II, delivering his lines with delightful menace.

Working from a booth backstage, "I can see everything. It's live, not recorded," he said. "It's my first experience."

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Name's not the same but talent still shines

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

THE MARSHA WATERBURY you meet backstage at the Birmingham Theatre doesn't look at all like Audrey, the wispy-voiced blonde with mincing steps who stars in "Little Shop of Horrors" at the theater.

She does look like the Marsha Scaggs who appeared in "They're Playing Our Song" at Detroit's Fisher Theatre with Victor Garber and later at the Birmingham Theatre with Larry Kert. Scaggs was her married name until she got divorced and then starred on Broadway in "Smile."

"I just love this town," said the tall, brunette actress, after greeting a reporter and photographer team. She stayed in Birmingham during both runs of "They're Playing Our Song" and is back again for the new show.

Waterbury needed just a few minutes to touch up her fluffy coiffure. She had been out shopping for a wig to wear as Audrey and had mused up her hair.

"This one looks just like straw," she said, showing the original wig. "This is more ash," she said, holding a smoothly styled, blonde wig. "I've been cutting it."

THE PRETTY performer spoke easily, in a refreshing manner, about her family, her early stage career, her Broadway and Off-Broadway shows and tours.

"It's real nice to be back, and here starring in the Midwest," she said. Waterbury's family lives outside Cleveland, in North Olmsted. Her dad will be driving up a family car for her to use during the run of the Birmingham Theatre production, which continues through Sunday, May 31.

"I wanted to do this since I was seven," she said of her acting career. "There used to be a tent theater outside Cleveland called Music Carnival. My parents worked there. Both were classical singers."

Her mother now does little theater, and her dad plays saxophone in a big band. Her older sister, Laura, is an actress who has done musical revues and lives in Los Angeles.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Marsha Waterbury, formerly Marsha Scaggs, is the star of "Little Shop of Horrors" at the Birmingham Theatre. She plays Audrey, for whom the plant is named, in the musical she says is "a satire, a parody of a bad B movie. I just think it's hysterical."

WATERBURY STUDIED acting at 16 in Cleveland, then went to Purdue.

"After a year, I decided I want to go where the action is," she said. At 19, she went to New York and worked for a theater group update. Her pay was \$10.

After that, she studied for two years at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, then ran a theater with actor Jimmy Scaggs, who was her husband, in Harrisburg, Pa.

pageants opened last November and closed in January after critics panned it.

Hamisch spent seven years getting "Smile" to Broadway.

"I worked two years on the thing," Waterbury said. "I had to audition for it six times."

"Smile" is by Howard Ashman, who wrote the book and lyrics and directed the show. He's also the author of "Little Shop of Horrors."

"He did all three with 'Little Shop,'" Waterbury said.

Victor Valentine directs the Birmingham production.

Although Waterbury was unhappy with the character she played in "Smile," she said of the ill-fated show, "I felt there was an audience for it. The audience loved it."

BASED ON the cult movie, "Smile," which starred Barbara Felton, Broadway's version cast Waterbury as a beauty contestant who didn't win the pageant at 17 but went back to compete, at age 35, for the job of pageant spokeswoman.

"Smile" went through a lot of changes.

"They kept changing, cutting and fixing it," Waterbury said. "I thought they took the bite out of it."

"The drama of the play was, What will this woman do? What is success? She's like a Mary Tyler Moore gone bad. She does some strange stuff to win."

When the emphasis shifted away from her character to accent the beauty contestants instead, the show and Waterbury's role suffered, she believes.

"I love the idea of portraying women in sort of the middle-class American society," Waterbury said. "I'm going to end up writing something, I think, about women from suburbia."

After "Smile" closed, she played Off-Broadway in "Nunsense." Another actress in the show is Susan Gordon-Clark, who is from Birmingham and lives across the hall from Waterbury, in New York.

"We're really tight friends," Waterbury said.

WHAT'S NEXT for Waterbury, she hopes, is a new TV series. She did a pilot for CBS-TV and expects to

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