

Musical flowers at Avon Players

Performances of the Avon Players production of "Little Shop of Horrors" continue through Saturday, Oct. 20, at the playhouse in Rochester Hills. For ticket information call 375-1390.

By Barbara Michals special writer

Spoofing the horror movies and the music of the 1950s, "Little Shop of Horrors" is a wickedly funny musical. The current production by the Avon Players is wonderfully polished and energetic.

In the incongruous setting of a Skid Row flower shop, one strange and unusual plant brings sudden fame and fortune to the shop's inhabitants. The catch is that the plant thrives only on human flesh and blood and is very vocal in its demands to be fed.

Mr. Mushnik (Jon Katz) is about to close his flower shop for good in a fit of economic despair when his nerdy shop assistant Seymour (Kevin Branshaw) introduces Audrey II, the unique plant he came upon following a sudden eclipse of the sun. He has named the plant after his co-worker Audrey (Lynda Whiting), a kind-hearted dentist who dates a sadistic dentist (Steve Tadevic).

In a Faustian parody, Seymour loses his soul to the demands of the plant in order to win Audrey's love. The insatiable plant, however, turns out to be more than Seymour can reckon with.

UNDER DIRECTOR Kimberley Britt, most aspects of the Avon production are top-notch, including the talented principals and the many extras who are well-utilized

to enhance the humor.

As Seymour, Branshaw has a winsomeness reminiscent of the young Robert Morse, and his strong vocal skills show to full advantage in the musical's delightful songs. Whiting is outstanding as Audrey, her nasal intonations as smooth and natural as her counterpart in the off-Broadway original. Her fine singing is as well-polished as her acting, and both she and Branshaw have strong stage presences.

As Mr. Mushnik, Katz is well-acted but occasionally stilted, a fault perhaps attributed to the writing since Mushnik is mostly a caricature. Tadevic is effectively amusing as the evil Orin Scrivello, the dentist who found a suitable way to utilize his love of inflicting pain.

Crystal, Ronette and Chiffon, the trio of street "urchettes" who function as back-up singers and sort of Greek chorus, are well-sung by Rebecca Bahling, Cathy Zucker and Amy Sharpe.

Puppeteer David McKnight does a good job animating Audrey II's movements. As the voice of the plant, Kim Montross has the right pitch and timbre, but when he sings the lyrics are too indistinct.

SIMILARLY THE opening narrative statement is spoken so indistinctly it is all but indecipherable. That, plus a few lighting miscues Saturday night, detracts only slightly from the production's high level of achievement.

Joyce Harner's costumes are effective, especially the disheveled look of the Skid Row denizens. Montross's set works well, and the five-piece combo under music director Paula D'Ambrosio always sounds good.

table talk

Brunch, bus

The Kingsley Inn in Bloomfield Hills provides a service to Detroit

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upcoming things to do

VIVACE SEASON

Orthelia Barnes opens Birmingham Temple Vivace Season 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14, in a candlelit cabaret concert, in Farmington Hills. Barnes has often been called Detroit's diva of soul and blues. For ticket information call Irene Cohen at 288-3963.

HARVEST FESTIVAL

Harvest Festivals hosted by local American House Retirement Residences 9:4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14, are open to the public at no charge. Each American House will feature its own special entertainment. Angela De Albuquerque will sing in Birmingham. Walter Wink will play an electric organ accordion and provide music for singing and dancing in Westland. Farmington will conduct their annual crafts bazaar. Performers include singers-dancers Helen Dinardi and Patti Baker of Sound Trax and guitarist Mike Meyer. The Elmwood American House in Rochester Hills has booked country-western singer Madeline Allen. Margaret Schmitt, "the Farm Lady," is bringing several farm animals and a slide show on older making to American House/Stone in Rochester Hills.

MOSCOW CIRCUS

The Moscow Circus returns to the Palace of Auburn Hills for nine performances, Wednesday, Nov. 7, through Sunday, Nov. 11. Tickets at \$15, \$12.50, \$10 and \$7.50 reserved, plus VIP seating, are on sale at the Palace box office and all Ticketmaster outlets. Tickets may be charged by calling 645-6666.

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

Serpent's Tooth Theatre Company, a new professional theater in residence on the campus of Oakland Community College-Royal Oak, presents its premiere production of A.R. Gurney, Jr.'s "Another Antigone" from Friday, Oct. 12, through Sunday, Oct. 28, at the Lila R. Jones Johnson Theatre in Royal Oak. Tickets at \$12-\$15 may be bought at the door or reserved by calling 544-4940.

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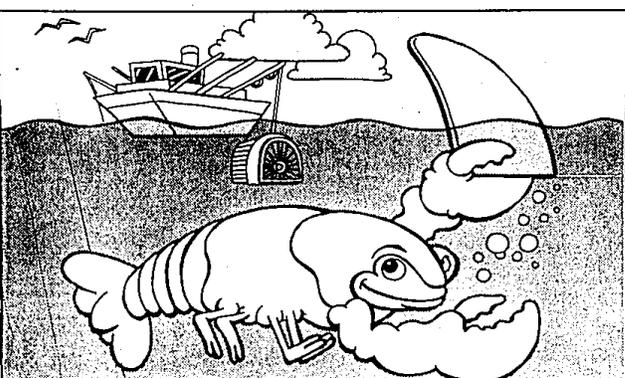
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