



Society : Hounslow Light Opera Company
Production : Little Shop of Horrors
Date : Saturday, October 21st
Venue : Hampton Hill Theatre
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It was a pleasure it was to have visited Hounslow Light Opera Company and introduce myself as the new NODA Representative for London District Three. Many thanks to Elizabeth Malone for her kind invitation, making the necessary arrangements for my visit and the warm welcome on arrival.

Little Shop of Horrors – The Musical is based on the 1960 low-budget horror/comedy rock film about Seymour, a poor florist shop worker, who discovers a strange and exotic plant that needs human blood and flesh as food. This show requires both a talented male and female principal together with a strong supporting cast. It also requires an experienced puppeteer and equally talented male voice for Audrey II - the carnivorous plant.

Congratulations must go to Bill Compton who, as Director, was responsible for the overall show and its success. It must have been pleasing to see all your hard work come together in such a strong overall performance. The principals had been very well cast and maintained their believable characterisations at all times. Actual staging worked well and there was no obvious masking or ‘backs to the audience’ whilst speaking. Attention to detail during rehearsals ensured everything ran smoothly with no delays or distractions.

Whilst there was plenty of room for the cast onstage, Musical Director Lee Dewsnap and his band were unfortunately situated out of sight. This was completely understandable as there simply wasn't sufficient space in the auditorium. Nevertheless, it had no negative impact on the quality, or clarity, of the music which was perfectly in time with all singing. Lee had clearly ensured that the principal and ensemble vocals, were both well-rehearsed and that diction was always first rate. I was impressed by the blending of the band with the vocals and pleased the music never overshadowed principal or ensemble singing.

The opening scene was of a sparsely filled shop located on ‘Skid Row’. This simple, but tired looking, set was exactly what you'd expect to see in a run-down building. The first impression was of a failing florist's shop facing very tough times – exactly what it was.

Jack Walford played the lead male part of Seymour, a poor flower shop worker, and did so exceptionally well. Jack clearly brought out Seymour's awkward, and shy, characteristics in relationships with both his secret crush, co-worker Audrey, and stingy and grumpy boss Mr. Mushnik. Jack has an excellent voice he demonstrated this throughout the show. I particularly enjoyed his solo rendition of ‘Grow For Me’. The duet, with Audrey, ‘Closed For Renovations’ was an excellent example of timing and harmony. ‘Suddenly Seymour’ was another superb duet with Audrey. This moment of tenderness, when Seymour finally reveals his feelings for Audrey, was quite simply superb.

Johanna-Marie D'Oyly Chambers played opposite Seymour and filled the lead female role of Audrey. Trapped in a terrible relationship with Orin, the sadistic and evil dentist, Audrey was desperate for love and kindness. Johanna-Marie played the role perfectly. Strong acting skills were accompanied by a beautiful singing voice. As mentioned above, the duets with Seymour - 'Closed For Renovations' and 'Suddenly Seymour' gave Johanne-Marie the opportunity to enthrall the audience with her voice. It was the emotionally charged 'Somewhere That's Green' that was a real show-stopper however.

Tony Cotterill filled the role of Mushnik, the unhappy shop owner who took out his frustration on Seymour and Audrey. Realising that Audrey II was a ticket out of poverty, and imminent foreclosure, Mushnik's selfish thoughts were revealed in 'Ya Never Know'. Then, realising Seymour might actually leave, and take Audrey II with him, Mushnik asks Seymour to become his son in 'Mushnik and Son'. This was Tony's main opportunity to stretch his vocal chords and he did so well.

Rachel White (Crystal), Lindsey Anne Cumming (Ronnette) and Kirsten Johnson (Chiffon) made up the all-female 'Greek Chorus'. Effectively the show's narrators, this trio sang well providing some great doo-wop style harmonies/vocals. They were also busy throughout the show with plenty of opportunity for involvement onstage.

Michael Greator ex excelled in the role of Orin – Audrey's abusive and sadistic dentist boyfriend. After numerous examples of just how awful a person he was, Michael confirmed this in 'Dentist'. It was nothing short of a pleasure for the audience to see Michael being eaten alive by Audrey II and finally releasing Audrey from a life of misery.

I cannot finish without mentioning the fantastic puppetry, which brought Audrey II to life, metamorphosing from innocent looking pot plant to huge, very believable, man-eating fiend. Without someone capable of bringing "her" to life, in a believable fashion, it wouldn't have been half as much fun to watch. Shaun Lati excelled here in operating Audrey II and deserves much credit.

However, it was John Furlong who provided both the speaking, and singing, voice of Audrey II. John was simply superb in this unseen role and I particularly enjoyed 'Feed Me (Git It)' which was sung in a terrific, soulful R&B fashion. 'Suppertime' and 'Sominex/Suppertime (reprise)' were further opportunities to demonstrate sassy and sexy Motown singing!

It must have been difficult to coordinate speaking/singing with the plant's movements but Shaun and John had obviously practiced extensively and provided a very accomplished joint effort here.

The high quality programme, compiled by Anne Pringle, was full of interesting details for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some great photographs of rehearsals, interesting cast biographies and nice 'touches' throughout. I especially liked the Glossary of Terms and touching tribute to Les Dixon. It was also pleasing to see reference to NODA in the show programme.

The set design was straight forward and effective in ensuring minimal delays throughout the show. Cast members simply left the shop and entered 'Skid Row' with no need for set lengthy changes. The steps, on the side of the stage, were also used effectively and Orin's office was created with a spotlight and simple dentist's chair. Props were excellent from the ever growing Audrey II to the increasing flower stock, the dentist chair and gas helmet. Congratulations to Jack Tidball who, as Stage Manager, ensured everybody, and everything was in the right place at the right time.

Wardrobe was managed by Tom Wright who ensured all cast members were appropriately dressed for the time period and setting. Make-up was handled by individual cast members and again appeared appropriate.

Lighting was designed by Nigel Lewis, assisted by Intequab Masum and operated by Charley Hardwick. It was generally of a consistently good level with all cast members being clearly lit when required.

Sound Design was by David Gates who ensured everything worked well during the show with all speaking and singing being clearly audible.

Ensemble members also filled smaller cameo roles and I was aware that everyone appeared fully engaged throughout the production and contributed to the overall success and appeal of the show.

I am sure that the entire audience, like me, left feeling impressed with the quality of all cast members and Hounslow Light Opera Company in general. This was a most enjoyable performance and afternoon's entertainment - definitely 'value for money'.

I look forward to a long relationship with HLOC and in attending both 'The Zoo' and 'Ruddigore' in 2018.

Des Wilby
Regional Representative
NODA London District 3