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Andrew J. Perez as Seymour finds his demanding plant Audrey II (Aaron Hitchcock) is too much to handle in the campy musical "Little Shop of Horrors."

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Sacramento Theatre Company winds up season with 'Little Shop'

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Theater review: Strong cast shines in campy 'Shop of Horrors'

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Alan Menken and Howard Ashman's popular chamber musical "Little Shop of Horrors" has always thrived on cheeky simplicity. The story of a Faustian bond between an otherworldly plant that feeds on human blood and the unassuming florist shop worker who nurtures it provides comic guilty pleasure. The new, easygoing Sacramento Theatre Company production serves up this theatrical dessert with neither surprise nor disappointment.

Director Michael Laun's clean, even production boasts a strong-voiced and well-balanced ensemble, which does solid work with the early 1960s doo-wop tunes by lyricist Ashman and composer Menken. The musical's two creators took B-movie maven Roger Corman's 1960 low-budget horror comedy and in 1982 turned it into a campy set piece that has become a regional theater staple. The small cast, single unit set, and catchy tunes make this a production within the reach of most theater companies.

Here the effective cast is led by Andrew J. Perez as Seymour, the nerdy, put-upon florist, and Jessica Goldman as the relationship-challenged shop assistant Audrey. Both give broad, lively performances. Seymour has grown up in the skid row floral shop as the ward of owner Mushnik (Michael RJ Campbell) and he dotes on his co-worker Audrey. The shop teeters on the edge of shutting down until Seymour unveils an oddly compelling plant he has been growing in the back room. Before long, Seymour has become a horticultural celebrity, but the plant's dietary needs place unusual demands on Seymour.

Perez shows a genuine wide-eyed innocence while Goldman effortlessly charms as the low-self-esteem assistant, shining on the wistful ballad "Somewhere That's Green." Audrey dates bad-boy dentist Orin Scrivello, who continually abuses her, which ultimately motivates Seymour to take action. William Elsmann, now familiar to STC audiences for several roles over the last few years, has a field day here with numerous roles including the sadistic Orin on the multilevel parody "Dentist!" Jeffrey Lloyd Heatherly gives a dynamic performance as the compelling and soulful voice of the bloodthirsty Audrey II.

Three local streetwise girls, Chiffon, Crystal and Ronette (Gabriella Isaguirre, Miranda Lawson, Ure Egbuho), form a Greek chorus setting the scene and commenting on the action throughout the story with '60s girl-group harmonies and choreography. Jerald Bolden created the dances and directed the essential puppeteers. Aaron Hitchcock cleverly manipulated the Audrey II; other puppeteers were Tom Block, Javen Crosby, Dafydd Wynn and Garrick Sigl.

Dan Pool conducted the solid offstage four-piece band, but the sound was occasionally disrupted by a volume drop that was never corrected during the performance.

There's nothing to take very seriously in this easily digestible "Little Shop."

Little Shop of Horrors

three 1/2

What: Sacramento Theatre Company production of "Little Shop of Horrors"

When: 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through May 20.

Where: Main Stage, Sacramento Theatre Company, 1419 H St. Sacramento

Tickets: \$15-\$38. Half-price tickets available one hour before each performance, subject to availability.

Information: (916) 443-6722 or www.sactheatre.org

Running time: 1 hour, 55 minutes including one intermission

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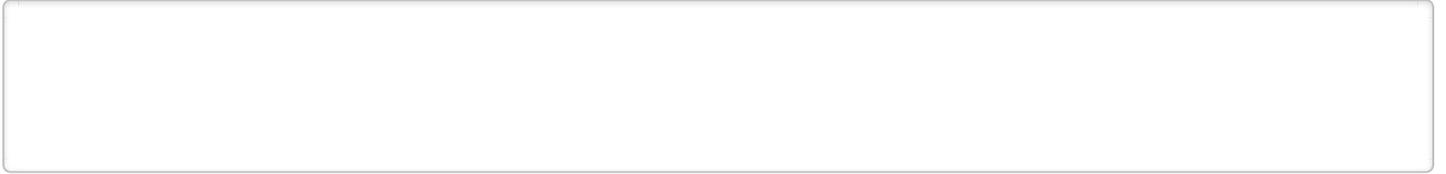
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