

Review: 'Little Shop' will get you thinking about plant life!

Friday night at the Ula Love Doughty Carousel Theatre at the University of Tennessee, I figured out the possible origin of Freudian psychology.

Broccoli.

When young Sigmund's mother would make him eat broccoli, he might have had fantasies about the broccoli eating his mother.

When director Roger Corman was putting together his B movie "Little Shop of Horrors," the stage adaptation of which is playing at the Carousel this Halloween weekend, he could have had the same idea.

Except Corman turned the broccoli into a live plant in a struggling skid-row flower shop that, in the Carousel version, looks like a pug-nosed eel with red lips and roots. But it still thrives on flesh and blood, demanding that Seymour, the nurdish dweeb - well played by Mitch Miller - who discovered, nourishes and names it, keep up the supply.

A street urchin taken in by the smarmy shop's owner, Mushnik, convincingly played by David Kortemeier, Seymour has a crush on Audrey, the shop's ditsy blond assistant, frothily played by Lindsey Jenne' Hansom. So Seymour names the plant Audrey II.

The problem is that Audrey has a menacing dentist boyfriend Orin, gleefully played by James McGuire, who beats her up when he isn't doping up on laughing gas from his dental office.

When Seymour puts Audrey II in the front window, the attraction turns the business around and puts Seymour in demand.

All kinds of customers and media types show up, all of them Freudianly played by McGuire.

Rather than lose his star attraction, Mushnik schemes to adapt Seymour as his son and business partner.

But Seymour, having discovered that he has an ego, is determined to make use of his new fame to gain Audrey's attention and have everything for himself.

But there's the issue of keeping Audrey II healthy and happy, a dilemma Seymour deals with by dispatching both Mushnik and Orin, solving multiple problems. (Freudian, don't you think?)

All of this, of course, is set to music that keeps things hopping. Much of it sung by a veritable chorus line made up of Lauren Elysse Fitzgerald's Crystal, Jenna Purdy's Ronette and Katlyn Whittenburg's Chiffon.

Making Audrey II work are puppeteers Zachary Parker and Patrick Ryan Kimberlin inside costume designer Kyra Beanland's anthropomorphic creation.

But at Audrey II's greedy heart is Brandon Gibson, who gives her a very intimidating voice.

After the in-your-face intimacy director Terry Silver-Alford has thrust at the audience in the production, plants might not look the same for a while.

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