

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS 1992

2

Times, Friday, January 31, 1992

ENTERTAINMENT

RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

Ice-well Flower power

LIKE a hot-house in the summer months or an echoing ice-well in the winter, Hampton Court Theatre is no user-friendly space in which to see a Teddington Theatre Club performance, and several off beat shows have played to thin houses.

Not so Richard Eliot's raunchy revival of *Little Shop of Horrors* all this week. Last Sunday, despite the January chill, the car park and theatre were full to overflowing for this smash-

hit Broadway musical about a triffid-like plant in a Brooklyn flower shop that grows and grows until it threatens to eat up the whole world.

Based on the Roger Corman film, not so much a B-movie as a Z-for-zilch spoof, the musical by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken was hated by serious London critics. But it became a modest cult among horror freaks, played to packed houses at the Bubble in Richmond a couple of years ago, and is now enjoying amateur status.

Since no credit is given in the TTC programme for creation of Audrey II, I presume you can hire the apparatus that becomes the people-eating plant. But hard-working Dominic Furey and Justin Comba sweat away within the green shell and scarlet uvula to give it horrific life, while Roger Roseboom growls 'Feed me!' in Audrey's black tone of voice that suggests a course of Meggezone by this weekend.

Caroline Dooley has the fair skin, lissom body and fragile glamour of a breathy Monroe as Audrey I, but the theatre acoustics rob us of many lines and mock-romantic lyrics; while at the early performance I saw Mark Crossland was offering a rather subdued Seymour, with occasional harsh vibrato.

Musically the show is easily stolen by Catherine Early, Michaela Key and Tracey Taverner as Street Urchins in figure-hugging Fifties numbers, and by Ben Furey (who choreographed with Francesca Vanelli), James Millard and Paul Thornley as the Bums in leathers.

But the stand-out star performance in this production comes from Mike Kneller as the sadistic dentist Orin, powerful and really frightening, with a magic line in nitrous-oxide giggles. Too bad that the character departs from our sight just before the interval.

Stephen Gray completes the cast as a cosy Mr Mushnik, while Francesca Vanelli and Roger Roseboom make brief opening appearances as Skid Row derelicts. Musical direction is by Duncan Jones, with fine atmospheric keyboard from Jerome Cacace and tremendous musical support by the band KGB, who appear from nowhere to take their final bows.

Graham Osborne who plays lead guitar has designed the splendid set, well up to finest TTC standards, with excellent, unobtrusive lighting by Mike Elgey, and Helen Smith leading a dedicated stage management team for this ambitious production.

John Thaxter

●Footnote: TTC's theatre appeal has collected nearly £72 thousand in cash and pledges, and predictions are that the club will not give up tenure of its ten-year home until the end of July at the earliest. But despite the impressive sums plus council promises of cash compensation, amassing the capital to build a tailor-made theatre in Hampton Hill is probably too a large extent in the lap of local charities and business benefactors.

JT

4

Times, Friday, February 7, 1992

LETTERS

Hire me Seymour!

Sir,—In my review last week of Teddington Theatre Club's *Little Shop of Horrors* production, noting the absence of any programme credit for creation of their Audrey Two, I speculated that it must now be possible to hire the apparatus that becomes the various growth stages of the horrifying people eating plant.

This prompted a quick response from Biddy Osborne, former queen of the TTC box office, who tells me that these amazing contraptions were not hired properties but in fact specially designed and built

by her son Graham Osborne and his wife Charlotte.

And she goes on to say that, because Graham had spent several previous weeks with a badly injured neck and right arm, they had to achieve their spectacular results in 'only twelve days of dawn to dawn shifts and at least two nights without sleep.'

And here comes the commercial: Graham is now prepared to make the Audrey equipment available for hire to interested professional and amdram companies; contact him via the Teddington Theatre Club.—John Thaxter, Stanley Road, Teddington.