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**Society:** Brantham Amateur Theatrical Society

**Title:** Little Shop of Horrors Book and Lyrics by Howard Ashman and Music by Alan Menken

**Director:** Pippa Revell

**Musical Director:** John Hoskyns

Performed at Brantham Village Hall, Brantham on Wednesday 15th February 2017 at 7.30pm

BATS production of Little Shop of Horrors was a fantastic example of how non-professional theatre can be just as creative, slick and entertaining as any professional show. The narrative flowed and scenes moved along quickly while song after song was pacy and energetic. The large cast and crew worked very hard and, most importantly, looked like they enjoyed themselves just as much as we did.

There was some super ensemble playing and vocal ability across the board was excellent. The cast had bags of energy and used the whole stage and auditorium to good effect. Costumes were just right and were accentuated by some brilliant hairstyling.

The set cleverly accommodated both the shop and the street outside, with a sliding screen providing an efficiently workable change of scene, ably managed most of the time by the street winos and the girl-group/narrators. Only the door through to the shop seemed sometimes unnecessary and began to grate a little when it was brought in and out in quick succession. The idea was a great one though and the creativity is to be commended. The scene in which the cast transform the run-down florist's shop into a thriving business was wonderfully achieved.

Ryan Maslen as Seymour had a massive challenge; the character is rarely off stage and has a gamut of emotions to get through, both emotionally and physically. Ryan's performance never faltered and his characterisation was excellent; appropriately nerdy and nervous, becoming stronger and more confident as he realises he has to face up to Orin the dentist and Audrey II. Well done Ryan.

Rebecca Hoskyns' Audrey was a perfect match for Seymour; the dumb blonde persona and fearful obedience to her violent dentist boyfriend were well portrayed. Whilst not quite the 'December bride' as suggested in the song; Rebecca was well-matched with both Ryan Maslen and Ryan Lenney in age and stage presence. Her performance of 'Somewhere that's Green' was beautifully sung, especially the plaintive reprise in her final moments.

Orin the sadistic dentist is a gem of a part and Ryan Lenney savoured every moment (hopefully not too much!). The physicality of the part is a challenge for a young actor but Ryan gave a confident and almost scarily convincing performance.

Rob Warne's Mushnik the shop owner and Seymour's adoptive father was another strong performance. His duet with Seymour on 'Mushnik and Son' was a real comedy highlight.

The roles of the three 'muses' who observe and narrate the show were in this case expanded to a senior and two junior 'teams'. Although it inevitably diluted the characters, it worked well enough and gave opportunities for more performers to take a role. Nancy Dines, Lea Friend and Lesley Mercer

## National Operatic and Dramatic Association

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looked and sounded wonderful as the more worldly wise and knowing of the girls. Their strong vocals linked the show throughout and they looked great in matching outfits; thankfully swapping the garish printed housecoats and marigolds for some Supremes style glamour in the finale. The younger set of girls had a great sense of 'attitude' and Team B, Charlotte Hoskyns, Sophie Mercer and Katie Hinson, (performing on the night I attended), worked very well together. Sophie Mercer it should be noted featured as Ronette in both teams A and B and had a very natural stage presence.

All other roles were played by the ensemble (Faith Arnold, Grace Bach, Fiona Morris, Caz Chapman, Kelsey Phillips, Arjan van Heuvelyn, Jaquie Lewis, Mark Hinson) with some doubling from the principals. The entire cast, including the Kids and Adult chorus were strong, confident and lively.

Audrey II herself was a triumph. Voiced by David Chilton and operated by Geoff Hewitson, the puppet itself was made in-house by members of the group. Each of its manifestations from the small 'strange and interesting plant' to the enormous Triffid-like monster which devours almost the entire principal cast were expertly created. This feat of prop-making stood testament to the effort and attention to detail given to this production, another reminder of the hard work that non-professional groups put in.

John Hoskyns' terrific musical direction meant all the singing was clear, confident and energetic and the overall sound was incredibly vibrant. His deft and skilful piano playing was ably accompanied by Felix Serrano on guitar and Russ Harris on drums. Choreography was good and despite the large cast the stage never looked overcrowded.

This was a fantastically enjoyable show which zipped along with pace and verve. It felt like a real team effort, with everyone giving their all to ensure we went home thoroughly entertained. Thank you very much.

*Caroline Roberts*

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