theatre:
CALGARY
Stafford Arima, Artistic Director

AUDIENCE GUIDE



LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

BOOK & LYRICS BY HOWARD ASHMAN, MUSIC BY ALAN MENKEN

BASED ON THE FILM BY ROGER CORMAN, SCREENPLAY BY CHARLES GRIFFITH
ORIGINALLY PRODUCED BY THE WPA THEATRE (KYLE RENICK, PRODUCING DIRECTOR)
ORIGINALLY PRODUCED AT THE ORPHEUM THEATRE, NEW YORK CITY BY THE WPA THEATRE,
DAVID GEFFEN, CAMERON MACKINTOSH AND THE SHUBERT ORGANIZATION
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to Theatre Calgary!

We're glad you're here. New for our 2026-2027 season, Theatre Calgary is introducing a set of Audience Guides to help enhance your experience of the production. Each guide offers a little dramaturgical context, giving you the story behind the story, to help you connect with the material–before, during, or after the show.

There's no required reading here–just an invitation to learn more about the world of the play. It might even help you fill in a few blanks so you can maximize your theatre-going experience. Inside you'll find background information on the script and members of the creative team; social, cultural, and historical context for the play; insight into the creative process; and questions to consider while you take it all in.

We hope these guides will help you discover something new or see something familiar from a new perspective. Above all, we hope you have a wonderful time at Theatre Calgary this season.

See you at the theatre,



Aliza Sarian
Audience Guide Developer
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WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE

An open mind.
Let the performance surprise you! Stay open to what can happen. Look for moments of theatrical magic (how did they change that costume so quickly?) and unexpected dialogue.

Assigned seats.
Every seat in the theatre offers a unique perspective on the action. Appreciate what you can see from your seat that someone else might not.

Live actors.
The performers on stage can see you, hear you, and feel your energy. Laugh when something is funny! Gasp when you're surprised! Applaud when you're impressed! Actors thrive on audience reactions.

A break from reality.
Theatre-makers ask the audience to "suspend their disbelief." If someone on stage says the red ribbon is blood, then it is! If an actor takes flight, then imagine you can't see the strings. This is what the actors ask of the audience. Embrace the magic of theatre.

Questions.
Listen carefully to the story being told. If you have a question, keep your voice to a whisper so it doesn't disturb others. Let yourself be challenged by the content. What new ideas or perspectives are you hearing?

Disconnection.
Put your phone away and immerse yourself in the technology of the theatre. The sounds and lights from your device are distracting to the actors, fellow audience members, and you! Plus, the law says that photos and videos aren't allowed, anyway.

THEATRE IS A TEAM SPORT

What you see on stage is just the tip of the production iceberg. Below are just some of the creative team members bringing a production to life.

- **The playwright** writes the script, sometimes from an original idea, sometimes adapted from a book or story–decides what the characters say and, often, gives the designers guidelines on how the play should look.
- **The director** creates the vision for the production, how it will look on stage, and works closely with the actors, costume, set, and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.
- **The actors** use their bodies and voices to bring the playwright's words and the director's ideas to life on the stage.
- **The designers** imagine and create the lights, scenery, props, costumes, and sound that will compliment and tell the playwright's story in a way that matches the director's vision.
- **The stage manager** assists the director during rehearsals by taking detailed notes and making sure the actors and designers understand these ideas. They are responsible for maintaining the consistency of the production through its run by making sure the actors' entrances and exits and lighting and sound all run smoothly.

ABOUT THE PLAY

SUMMARY.

Act I

Crystal, Ronnette and Chiffon, three streetwise young women–referred to in the script as *urchins*–introduce us to the world of *Little Shop of Horrors* and the people who inhabit it. Among them is Seymour Krelborn, a shy young man working in a struggling flower shop on Skid Row, the lowdown part of any city you might imagine. His co-worker–and the secret love of his life–Audrey dreams of a better life beyond the neighbourhood.

Everything changes when Seymour discovers a mysterious plant and brings it back to the shop. He names it Audrey II, and soon the unusual plant begins to attract attention and business to Mushnik's struggling flower shop.

As Audrey II grows, so does the store's success, transforming Seymour's life in ways he never imagined. But keeping the plant healthy presents Seymour with an increasingly unusual challenge–and potential exsanguination. Meanwhile, Audrey hopes for a fresh start away from her troubled relationship with her boyfriend, Orin, an over-the-top dentist whose personality is matched only by his masochism.

With the flower shop suddenly thriving, Seymour finds himself facing new opportunities and tough choices. As his ambitions–and Audrey II–flourish, Seymour must decide just how far he is willing to go to get the life he has always wanted.

ACT 1 SONGS

Little Shop of Horrors
Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Skid Row
Ensemble

Da-Doo
Seymour, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Grow For Me
Seymour

Ya Never Know
Mushnik, Seymour, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Somewhere That's Green
Audrey

Closed for Renovation
Seymour, Audrey, Mushnik

Dentist!
Orin, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Mushnik and Son
Mushnik, Seymour

Git It
Audrey II, Seymour, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Now (It's The Gas)
Seymour, Orin

Act I Finale
Audrey II, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Act 2

The flower shop is busier than ever, and Seymour and Audrey find themselves at the centre of a whirlwind of attention. As their relationship deepens, Seymour imagines a future with Audrey beyond Skid Row and a dead-end job.

But success comes with complications. Seymour's choices begin to catch up with him, while Audrey II demands more of his... attention. As the plant's appetite grows, so does Seymour's unease about what he has set in motion and questions about what happens next.

With fame and fortune within reach, Seymour confronts the consequences of his choices and must decide what and who matter most. Meanwhile, the public's growing interest in Audrey II brings new opportunities that could take the plant far beyond the flower shop.

As Seymour struggles to regain control, the line between ambition and responsibility becomes increasingly difficult to navigate. With everything he has dreamed of at stake, Seymour faces a final choice that will determine the fate of the people he cares about most.

ACT 2 SONGS

Call Back in the Morning
Seymour, Audrey

Suddenly Seymour
Seymour, Audrey, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Suppertime
Audrey II, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

The Meek Shall Inherit
Orin, Seymour, Crystal, Ronette, Chiffon

Sominex / Suppertime Reprise
Audrey, Audrey II

Somewhere That's Green Reprise
Audrey

Don't Feed The Plants / Finale
Ensemble

A VISUAL HISTORY OF AUDREY II



Menier Chocolate Factory, London, UK (2006)



Otterbein University, Westerville, OH (2014)


The Muny, St. Louis, MO (2011)

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.

SEYMOUR
an orphaned, insecure florist who makes a life-changing horticultural discovery



MR. MUSHNIK
Seymour's boss at Mushnik's Skid Row Florists; adopts Seymour has his own son

AUDREY
a blond bombshell & secret love of Seymour's life with a bad habit of bad boys



AUDREY II
Seymour's wise-cracking soon-to-be-famous carnivorous plant puppet

ORIN
Audrey's boyfriend, a sadistic dentist with violent tendencies

BERNSTEIN
uptown bigshot from NBC

MRS. LUCE
the wife of the editor of *Life* magazine

PATRICK MARTIN
a sleazy opportunist

CRYSTAL, RONNETTE, AND CHIFFON

The 1982 libretto (script) for *Little Shop of Horrors*, Crystal, Ronnette, & Chiffon were described as "three Black female street urchins who function as participants in the action...they're young, hip, smart, and the only people in the whole cast who really know what's going on," and the 2003 version–updated in 2022–adds a note that "it is encouraged that [these] roles be played by actors of color."

An outdated term, an *urchin* refers to a mischievous, ragged, and unsupervised child. This particular group of street urchins are styled after the popular Black, female Motown groups of the 50s and 60s.



The Chiffons



The Crystals



The Ronettes

HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.

5 FACTS ABOUT LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

1. *Little Shop* began as a low-budget horror film (1960), written in 10 days and shot in two.

2. The 1982 off-Broadway musical adaptation of the film played 2,209 performances, running for over five years and making it the third longest running off-Broadway musical.

3. A 1986 movie version of the musical based on the movie was released starring comedy legends Rick Moranis, Steve Martin, and Ellen Greene, who originated the role of Audrey off-Broadway.

4. Renowned puppeteer Martin P. Robinson designed and operated Audrey II for the 1982 production and the 2003 Broadway revival.

5. *The Little Shop* composer, Alan Menken, has also composed 15 Disney films including *The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Newsies, Aladdin,* to name a few.

WHAT IS CAMP?

An exaggerated, theatrical performance style marked by irony, flamboyance, and over-the-top characterizations; camp invites audiences to laugh at and with the performance's outrageousness. **See also:** *Titanique, Oh, Mary!, Clue, Evil Dead the Musical* (at Alberta Theatre Projects this fall!)

SCI-FI HORROR GENRE

Sci-fi horror combines elements of science fiction (advanced technology or extraterrestrial life) with horror themes like fear of the unknown and scientific experimentation gone wrong.

This genre can be thought-provoking while also delivering suspense and often features dystopian settings, futuristic concepts, and an exploration of existential dread.

Some classic sci-fi horror films include *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1974), *Alien* (1979), *The Thing* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), *Cloverfield* (2008), *A Quiet Place* (2018), and *Us* (2019).

***Little Shop of Horrors* is often categorized as sci-fi horror. What do you think? Can it be this and "camp" at the same time?**

THE LEGEND OF FAUST

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* tells the story of a man seeking knowledge and power. Faust meets the Devil, who offers him anything he desires. But in return, Faust must give the Devil his soul. Faust accepts the deal and goes on to enjoy a life filled with all he ever dreamed of. When time is up, however, Faust is taken straight to Hell, just as he'd agreed.

FAMOUS FAUSTIAN TALES

- *Damn Yankees* by Adler & Ross (1955)
- *Ghost Rider*, Marvel Comics (1972)
- *The Devil Went Down to Georgia,* Charlie Daniels Band (1979)
- *The Little Mermaid*, Walt Disney Animation (1989)
- *The Devil's Advocate* with Keanu Reeves & Al Pacino (1997)
- *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare* created by Infinity Ward (2016)

AUDREY II AND OTHER CARNIVOROUS PLANTS

Every designer who has encountered Audrey II strives to make it their own. The puppet design for Theatre Calgary's production–imagined by Beyata Hackborn and fabricated by Dean Bareham of Green Fools–is no exception. Theatre Calgary's Audrey II is an imagined combination of a Venus fly-trap, a Sundew, and a Begonia. Some other carnivorous plants that have inspired previous productions of *Little Shop of Horrors.*



Venus Fly-Trap



Sundew



Pitcher Plant



Australian Pitcher Plant



Butterwort



Monkey Cups



Cobra Lily



Bladderwort

Want to try your hand at growing your own carnivorous plant?
Visit one of these Calgary-owned plant shops!

Golden Acre Home & Garden (Skyline, NE)
Sprout Calgary Plant Store (Parkdale, NW
Plant (Inglewood, SE)
Greengate Garden Centres (Shawnee Slopes, SW)

A GREEK CHORUS



Karawina, Erica, 1904-2003; United States. Works Progress Administration.

Ronnette, Chiffon, and Crystal open the show with the title song, "Little Shop of Horrors" to set up the story and establish the *motif*–an intentional pattern that appears throughout a story–of a Greek chorus.

In Greek tragedy, the chorus speaks directly to the audience, voicing what they may be thinking and commenting on the story. A chorus also has the ability to control the action.

In this production, consider:

- How do the urchins fit into this definition of chorus?
- What different roles do they take on in the course of the show?
- Why do they take on these roles?
- How does this impact your experience as an audience member?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

A theatrical experience is not complete without reflection. What is the audience talking about when they leave the theatre? Here are some questions to consider on your way home from–or at the bar after–*Little Shop of Horrors* at Theatre Calgary.

1. Given its enduring popularity, how does *Little Shop of Horrors* hold up a mirror to reflect the current social issues and human behaviour?

2. How does the setting of *Little Shop of Horrors* shape the story? Why would the show's creators choose to set it in a downtrodden big city neighbourhood in the 1950s?

3. How was Theatre Calgary's production of *Little Shop of Horrors* different from other versions you may have seen before?

4. Consider the following questions on the theme of **sacrifice** in this otherwise fun, campy show:
   - Why doesn't Seymour kill Audrey II after it eats Mushnik?
   - Why does Audrey want her dead body placed in the plant?
   - What sacrifice does Seymour make by allowing the plant to live?

5. What did you notice about the effect of having a 10-piece orchestra and conductor supporting the performance?

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