

ARTS & LEISURE

PHOTO/MARK THALMAN



DON'T FEED THE PLANT Audrey II—the plant—and Seymour Krelbourn (Matt Bezmarevich) sing a duet in Chico State's *Little Shop of Horrors*, running this weekend in Laxson Auditorium.

changes that look like they were designed by Lucifer himself," said assistant stage manager Jerome Salyers. "In under 60 seconds the set has to go through a total facelift. Five minutes later it has to be reversed."

Sunday's technical rehearsal focused on that switch, in which the flower shop—including a life-sized Audrey II—is transformed into a dentist's office. As stage manager Linda Galvin gave direction, the nine-member stage crew, led by Salyers, worked the time required for the exchange down from 1:15 to 1:05 to 57 seconds and finally, breathing hard, 52 seconds. "OK," Galvin said. "Let's go home."

Directorial decisions had to take the 1986 movie into account. "The movie is a nice superficial comedy," said director Randy Wonzong, "but I feel like the characters in the movie are cartoons. We'd like to put some heart in them. It's feeling that moves a play, not action; I wanted Audrey and Seymour to have a real love story. It's impossible not to be upstaged by the plant, but I would like people to walk out saying, 'What a nice love story.'"

The bizarre, grisly conclusion of Chico's *Little Shop* may come as a shock to audience members familiar with the film; even Wonzong isn't entirely happy with it. "The ending is strange in the play," he said. "All the principals are dead. It doesn't satisfy. The director has to hope that the audience is so impressed that they're out to their cars before they wonder, 'What was that about?'"

"It's a really different kind of musical," said Amy Alward "[Typically] everything comes up roses. This isn't like that; it's a black comedy."

In a show with excellent singing from the entire cast, CSUC music major Alward stands out. The only problem she had with the role of Audrey, she said, was competing with Ellen Greene, whose distinctive characterization wowed audiences on Broadway and in movie theaters.

"I tried not to let it influence me, but I found myself developing a character very much like [Greene's]," Alward said. "Most of it is written right into the script. I think mine's maybe just a little bit smarter and a little more downtrodden and abused."

Alward is impressed with the cast's dependability and commitment. "Everybody has really been on top of their stuff," she said. "What I've usually seen at this university are a few dedicated people and a couple who would rather be watching Monday Night Football than be at rehearsal. There's nobody like that in this cast."

"They've worked hard and come a long way," Wonzong said Tuesday. "This could be one hell of a show. We've been rehearsing for eight weeks, we're tired, and we're ready to open."

—MATTHEW BUDMAN

The leafy green likes of *Little Shop of Horrors*, Chico State's spring musical, have not been seen here before. Running through Sunday in Laxson Auditorium, the show should amuse and horrify—but by no means will it disappoint.

The play has gone through a strange evolution. Originally a 1960 Roger Corman movie noted for a unique blend of hysterical comedy and campy horror as well as for having been filmed in two days, *Little Shop* was transformed into a Broadway musical in the mid-1980s and was made into a hit 1986 film starring Rick Moranis and Ellen Greene.

The story provides great opportunity for both comedy and horror: Mushnik's Flower Shop on Skid Row becomes successful when employee Seymour Krelbourn (Matt Bezmarevich) develops a strange strain of Venus flytrap that won't settle for flies and water. Named Audrey II, after the Audrey (Amy Alward) who works in the shop, the plant makes the shop a success and Seymour a star—with some gruesome conditions. The shop owner (Donovan Schinkel) and Audrey's biker-dentist boyfriend (Bruce Dillman) thicken the plot.

Naturally, the plant itself has received most of the attention. Four different Audrey IIs of increasing size (and hunger) are required for the show, and the last version must be carried on stage by no fewer than four stagehands. George Hoffman operates the plant, while Joel Avalos sings and talks into a backstage microphone while watching Audrey II on a TV monitor.

The Laxson Auditorium set, designed by James Gilbert, is detailed and altogether realistic. A visible alley runs behind Mushnik's shop, while trash and winos litter the doorsteps and sidewalk.

"I'm really satisfied with the way it's come out," said assistant director Melissa Pat-

Big Green

'LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS' GOBBLES UP CHICO STATE

erson. "You go in anticipating problems, but you don't know what the problems will be: Singing beyond an orchestra so everyone can hear you, acting beyond scenery that's larger than life, getting the plant and the voice to work together and give it human characteris-

tics, trying to get sound levels right."

With a few exceptions—including handling the four different plant models and coordinating 120 light cues—*Little Shop* is less demanding than one might expect. "Technically it's relatively calm, except for a few set