

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

dramaturgy packet

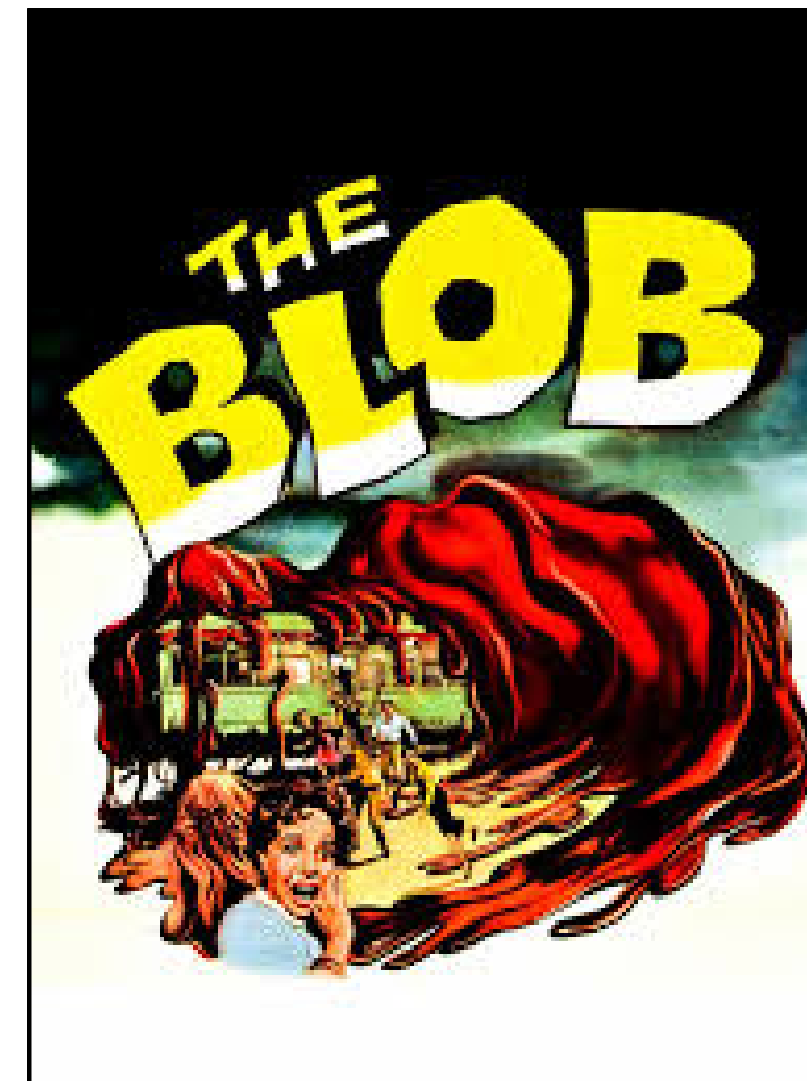
greater boston stage company
directed by ilana ransom toeplitz
june 6-29, 2025

created by
shira helena gitlin

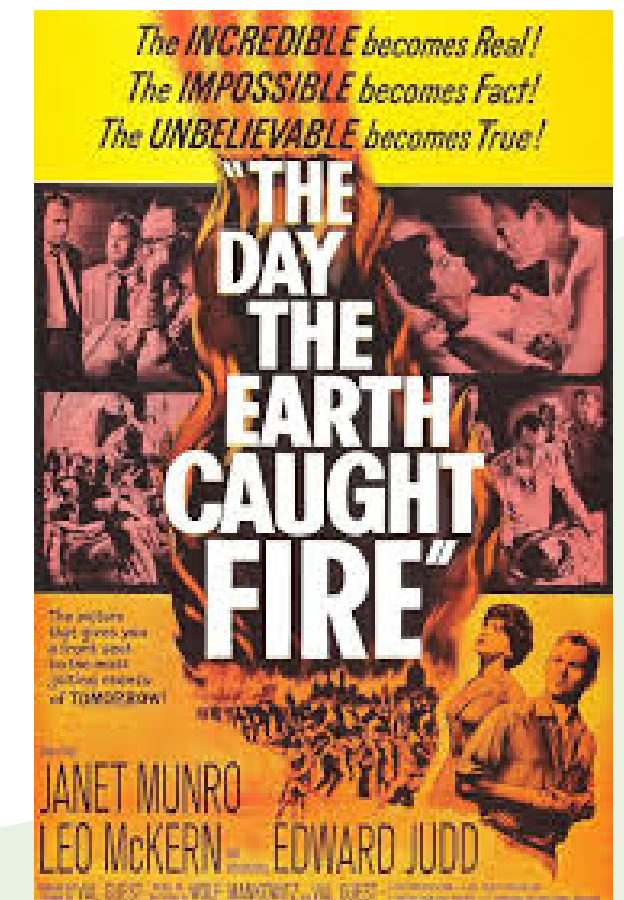
sci-fi b movies (1950-1960's)

b movies: low-budget films with sensational plots, bizarre effects, and quirky characters, often became cult & camp classics.

- The 1950's & 1960's were a pivotal time for science fiction & horror B-movies, marking a “golden age” for the genre with both literary and cinematic advancements.
- Compelling narratives of **survival**, **alien invasion**, and **dystopian futures** that mirrored the era's anxieties with the Cold War and the rise of space exploration.
- Called B-movies because they were often sold as the “B-side” to another movie.



the blob (1958)



the day the earth caught fire (1961)

monsters & maidens

"The image is one of Wagnerian splendor as SEYMOUR stands for a moment, holding the dead Audrey in his arms" -pg 90



frankenstein meets the
wolfman (1943)



creature from the black
lagoon (1954)



horror of dracula (1958)

strange exotic plants

"cult of the killer plant"

When the **plant horror sub-genre** first emerged, the idea of alien plant life slowly polluting our environment was used as an allegory for the red scare, the films reflecting upon (and satirising) western society's fear of an enemy within.



the thing from another world (1951)



the day of the triffids (1962)



the invasion of the
body snatchers (1956)

strange exotic plants

real-life carnivorous plants



pitcher plant



venus fly trap



cobra lily



butterwort



monkey cup

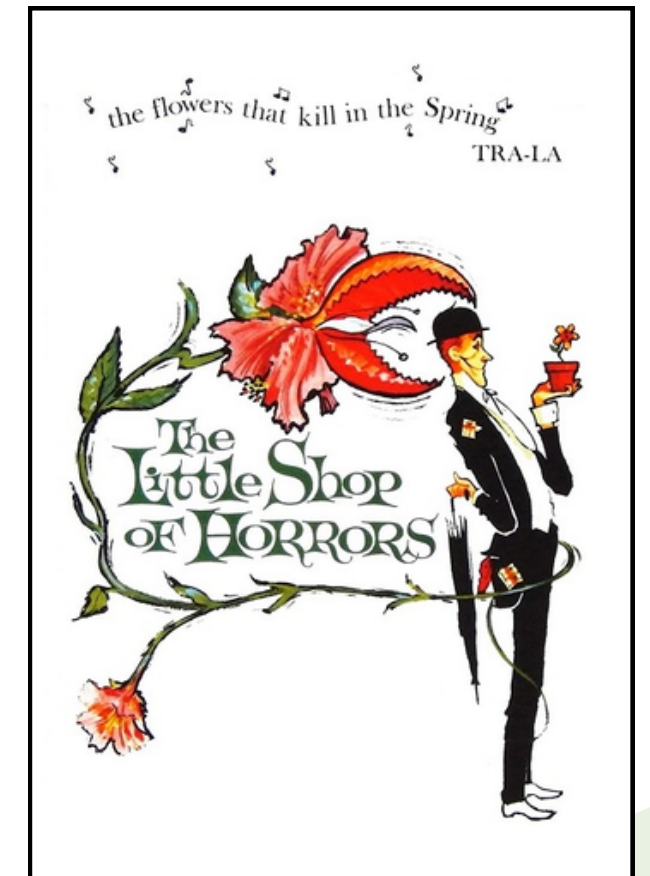


australian sundew

source material

- Directed by the “King of B Movies” Roger Corman.
- Produced under the title *The Passionate People Eater* and shot on a budget of \$28,000.
- Originally distributed as the B movie in a double feature with *Black Sunday* and *Last Woman on Earth*.
- Shot on sets that had been left standing from *A Bucket of Blood*.
- Based on a 1932 story called "Green Thoughts" by John Collier, which is about a man-eating plant and may have been influenced by Arthur C. Clarke's sci-fi short story "The Reluctant Orchid".
- Jack Nicholson has a small role as a dental client!

1960 movie

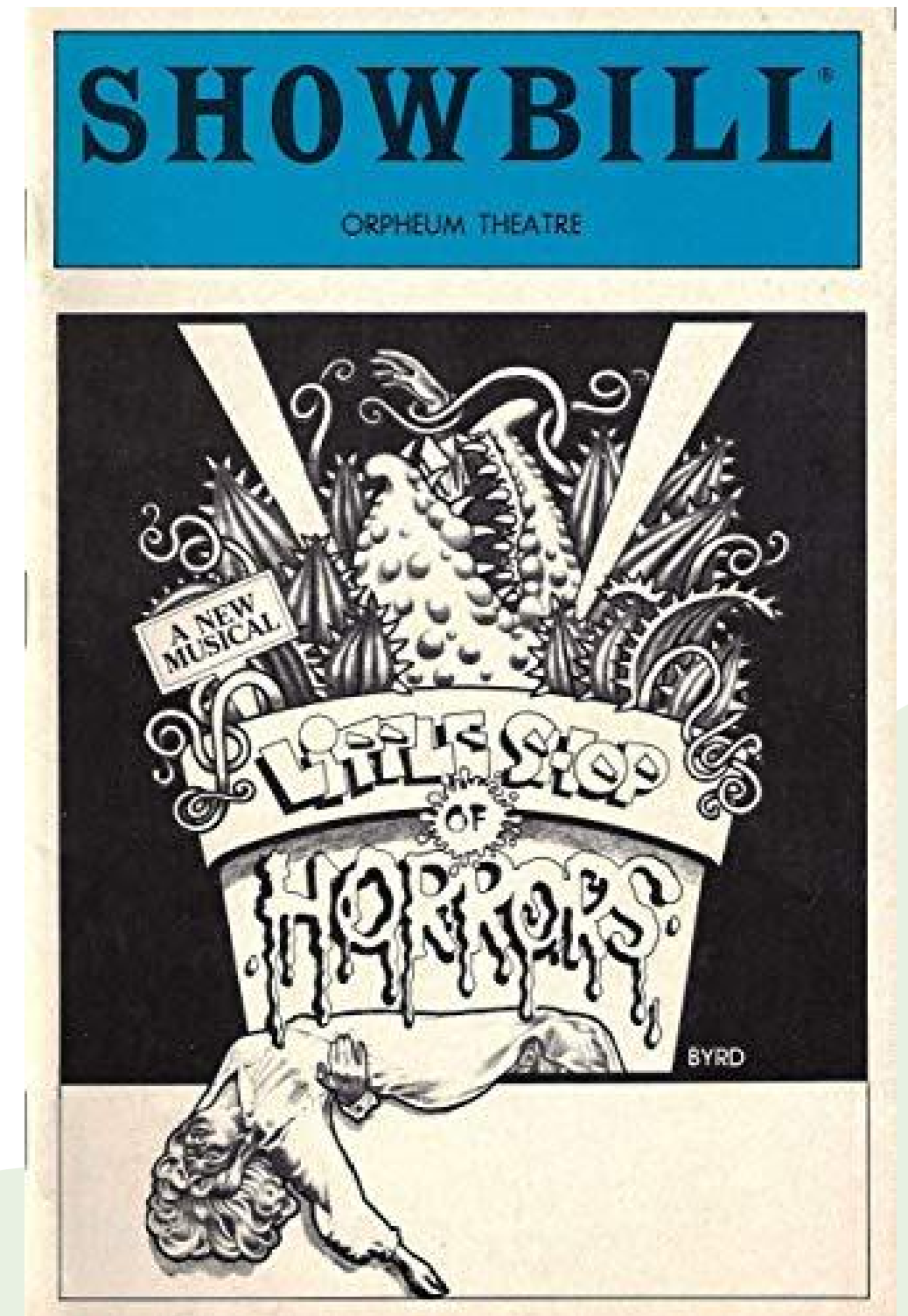


broadway debut

- Based on the concept and dark comic tone of the 1960 film, although much of the story is changed.
- *Different ending:* In the 1960 film, Mushnik and Audrey survive, and the plant's carnivorous activities are discovered when its flowers bloom with the faces of its victims, including Seymour, imprinted on them.
- Premiered Off-Broadway at the WPA Theatre in New York. Directed by Howard Ashman (book writer). The show transferred to the Orpheum Theatre and ran for over 2,000 performances.

"Little Shop of Horrors, at the WPA Theater...is a Faustian musical about a timid clerk who sells his soul to a man-eating Cactus. Admittedly this is a rather rarefied idea for a musical comedy, but the evening is as entertaining as it is exotic. It is a show for horticulturists, horror-cultists, sci-fi fans and anyone with a taste for the outrageous" (New York Times, 1982)

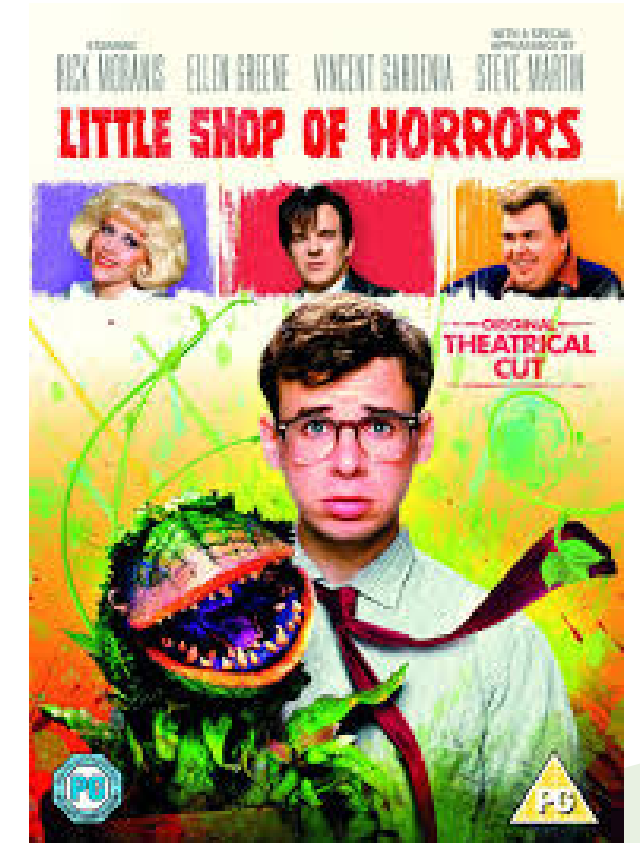
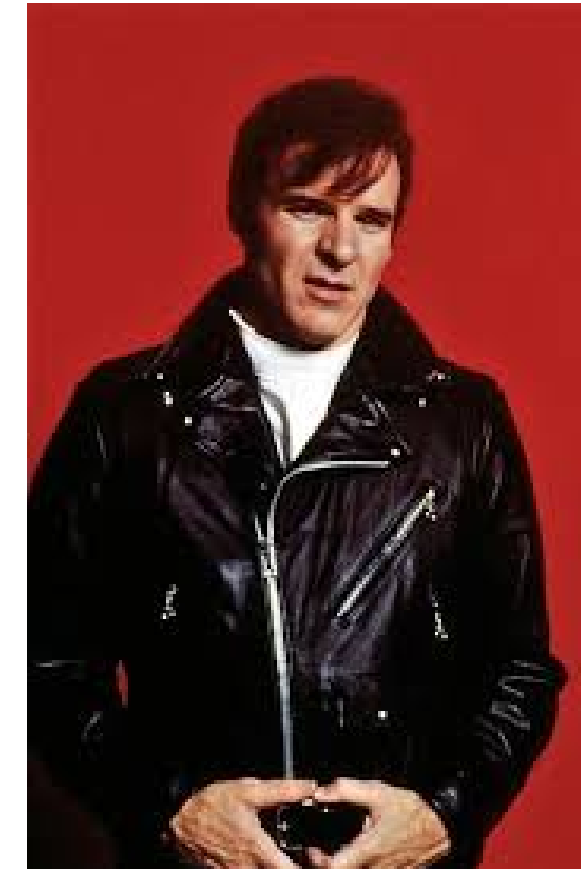
1982



movie adaptation

- Directed by Frank Oz, adapted from the musical.
- Stars Rick Moranis, Ellen Greene, Vincent Gardenia, and Steve Martin.
- Produced on a budget of \$25 million, in contrast to the original 1960 film, which only cost \$28,000 to make.
- Well-received by critics and audiences, and eventually developed a cult following.
- The film's original 23-minute finale, based on the musical's ending, was rewritten and reshot after test audiences did not react positively to it.
- In the original ending, Audrey and Seymour die and the plant goes on to take over the world (like in the musical). In the released ending, Audrey and Seymour survive and move to the suburbs.

1986 movie



the music of little shop

alan menken

Alan Menken is an American composer and conductor. Over his career he has received numerous accolades; he is one of 21 recipients to have won the competitive EGOT (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony).

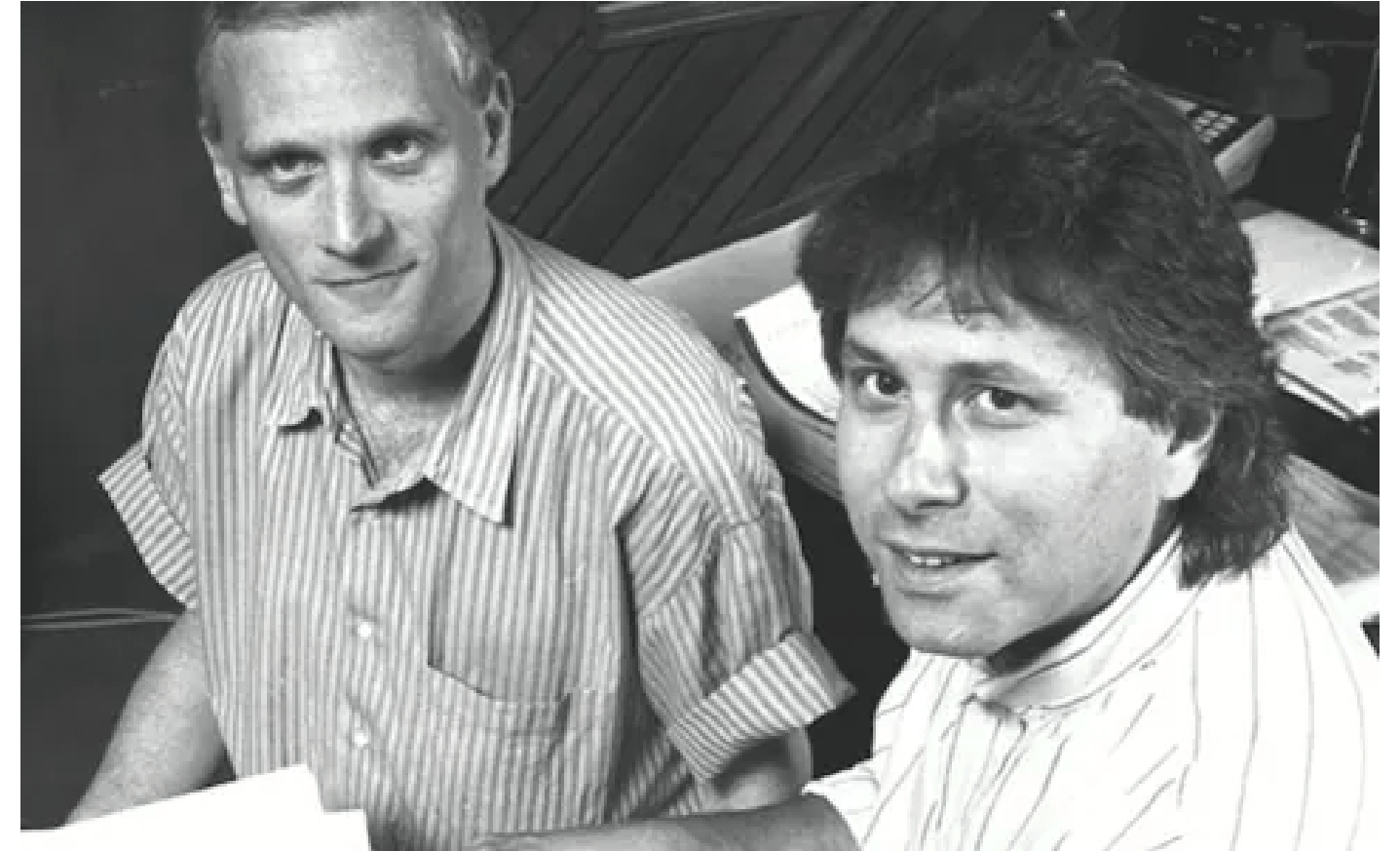
Menken is most known for his work with Disney, having worked on many of the “Disney Renaissance” films.

Menken has written with numerous lyricists throughout his career, but his most famous collaboration was with Ashman, despite having worked together for a relatively short period of time.

howard ashman

Howard Ashman was an American playwright, lyricist and stage director known for his collaborations with Alan Menken, most of which were for Disney.

Ashman was openly gay and was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in January 1988 and passed away in March 1991, during the production of *Beauty and the Beast*.



other works together include:

- The Little Mermaid (1989)
- Beauty and the Beast (1991)
- Aladdin (1991)

**somewhere that's green and part of
your world have almost identical
melody lines!**

the urchins

black girl groups of the 1960's



the crystals



the ronettes



the chiffons

There were many influential black girl groups in the 1950's and 1960's including The Supremes, Martha & The Vandellas, Patti LaBelle & The Bluebells, The Marvelettes, and The Shirelles. Our urchins get their names from these three groups listed above. The sound pioneered by these girl groups greatly influenced the R&B, soul, pop, and doo-wop scene.

greek tragedy

framing

The opening narration of Little Shop of Horrors establishes that a catastrophe is on the horizon – this warning is a common preamble to literary tragedies.



tragic hero

Seymour is a tragic hero – a literary character who makes a judgment error that inevitably leads to their own destruction.



greek chorus

The urchins are a greek chorus – a group of people that react and comment on the moral issues that are raised by the dramatic action or express emotions appropriate to each stage of the dramatic conflict.

yiddish & judaism in little shop

jewish humor of the 1960's

When the original movie was made, Charles B. Griffith (writer) and Roger Corman (director) were interested in “**combining dark comedy with farce and incorporating Jewish humor and elements of spoof.**”

So what is “Jewish humor”?

In the 1950's, Jewish comedians like Mike Nichols, Elaine May, and Alan Arkin helped pioneer the comedy and improv field. None more so than Jerry Lewis, who found his niche as a “crowd-pleasing clown and social commentator”. In his comedy, Lewis wanted to make a statement about the plight of the “little guy.” Mel Brooks continued on the tradition of Jewish comedy in movies with *The Producers* in 1967.

jewish stereotypes & antisemitism

Mr. Mushnik is a fairly stereotypical New York Jew, who uses “yinglish” or yiddish-english phrases. Seymour is often coded as Jewish as well. Both characters were played by Jewish actors in the original movie, who have been credited as adding their own “yiddish-isms” to the script. Howard Ashman and Alan Menken were both Jewish, and so the musical also plays with some of these stereotypes and references as well.

It could be very easy to make Mushnik a Jewish stereotype, much like Fagin in *Oliver*. After all, his defining traits are “greed and complaining”. Some people feel that because of this, the show veers into antisemitic territory. Ultimately, treating these characters with respect and investigating these mannerisms without turning them into stereotypes can go a long way towards identity-conscious acting.

glossary & reference guide

click through each name for more information!

<u>faust legend</u>	pg 7	<u>richard the third</u>	pg 9	<u>better homes and gardens magazine</u>	pg 35
<u>fay wray</u>	pg 7	<u>the shangri-la's</u>	pg 14	<u>snow white and the seven dwarves</u>	pg 37
<u>jerry lewis</u>	pg 8	<u>west side story</u>	pg 20	<u>howard johnson</u>	pg 39
<u>billie-dawn</u>	pg 8	<u>solar eclipse</u>	pg 23	<u>marquis de sade</u>	pg 42
<u>judy holliday</u>	pg 8	<u>the wolf man</u>	pg 30	<u>jack paar</u>	pg 51
<u>carol channing</u>	pg 8	<u>edgar allan poe</u>	pg 32	<u>hedy lamarr</u>	pg 51
<u>marilyn monroe</u>	pg 8	<u>george washington carver</u>	pg 33	<u>king tut</u>	pg 51
<u>goldie hawn</u>	pg 8	<u>levittown</u>	pg 34	<u>the ritz</u>	pg 52
<u>grease (1978)</u>	pg 8	<u>betty crocker</u>	pg 35	<u>harley "machine"</u>	pg 52
<u>otis redding</u>	pg 8	<u>donna reed</u>	pg 35	<u>james dean</u>	pg 52
<u>barry white</u>	pg 8	<u>lucy (lucille ball)</u>	pg 35	<u>general custer</u>	pg 92
<u>wolfman jack</u>	pg 8	<u>father knows best</u>	pg 35		

glossary & reference guide

skid row

a dilapidated, impoverished section of a city usually associated with homeless populations, crime, and substance abuse. (pg 15)

yiddish

a language used by Jewish people in central and eastern europe before the holocaust. It was originally a german dialect with words from Hebrew and several modern languages. (pg 15)

terrazzo

a mosaic flooring or paving composed of chips of broken stone, usually marble, and cement, polished when in place. (pg 18)

hop-heads

a drug user, particularly one addicted to opium, morphine, or heroin. (pg 18)

drip

an older slang term for a boring, unintelligent man (pg 18)

kaput

broken and useless; no longer working or effective. (pg 21)

nogoodnik

yiddish slang term referring to a worthless or idle person, a ne'er-do-well, or someone who is not of good character. (pg 25)

klutz

yiddish slang term for a clumsy, awkward, or clumsy person, often implying foolishness or a lack of coordination. (pg 30)

gratis

latin, free (pg 37)

glossary & reference guide

C.O.D.	cash on delivery (pg 37)
mrs. shiva	a shiva is a jewish mourning practice, so mr. shiva running a funeral home is a little bit funny (pg 38)
pacem	latin, peace (pg 40)
vitalis-brain	vitalis is a brand of hair care tonic; implies that the person being addressed cares more about their looks than how they act. (pg 41)
leader of the plaque	this is a reference to the song “Leader of the Pack” (pg 42)
gott in himmel	yiddish, god in heaven (pg 45)
mensch	yiddish slang, means a person of high integrity and honor (pg 46)
mishegoss	yiddish slang, craziness, foolish behaviour (pg 47)
putz	yiddish slang, a person who is foolish or is worthless (pg 51)

glossary & reference guide

eighty-six

a restaurant/bar term used when an item has run out or to eject a customer; starting in the 1970s it referred to killing someone. (pg 52)

nookie

a slang term, primarily used by men, referring to sexual activity. It's often considered vulgar and has a somewhat playful or suggestive connotation. (pg 52)

impacted

a dentistry term for when a tooth is stuck in gum tissue or bone for various reasons (pg 55)

abscessed

refers to when a tooth develops a pocket of pus caused by a bacterial infection (pg 55)

laissez faire

french, a policy or attitude of letting things take their own course without interfering (pg 59)

life magazine

a magazine published from 1883 to today traditionally known for its quality of photography. (pg 79)

glossary & reference guide

**william morris
agency**

a talent agency that represented some of the most famous people in Hollywood and entertainment between 1898 to 2009 when it merged with another agency (pg 81)

cable

short for cablegram: a message sent by underwater cable (pg 81)

sominex

a brand of medicine known as an antihistamine used mostly to relieve allergy symptoms but also used as a sleep aid (pg 87)

**"you ain't in
kansas"**

a reference to a line in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz* meant to suggest that a person is no longer in a position or place that is known to them.(pg 88)



Sources

little shop of horrors

Little Shop of Horrors Through the Years

The Little Shop of Horrors (1960) Review

Little Shop of Horrors (1981 Musical)

Little Shop Throughout the Years

Little Shop of Horrors (1986)

Little Shop of Horrors Study Guide

Alan Menken & Howard Ashman

How Howard Ashman and Alan Menken Created the Iconic Little Shop of Horrors

Anti-semitism in Little Shop of Horrors

sci fi, horror, b-movies, plants, etc!

Diving Deeper | Science Fiction, Satire, and the Cult of the Killer Plant

Scary Monsters, Robots, and Apes Carrying-Off Women

10 Great Killer Plant Films

8 Awesome Carniverous Plants

Jewish Humor of the 1960's

Black Women and Rock & Roll

In Memoriam:
Low Budget Audrey II
(low budget milky white still exists)