

Commonweal opens a twisted musical comedy

By Tom Weber

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LANESBORO — Usually, we would consider a play about a man-eating plant that poisons the ambitions of a once-humble store clerk, eats body parts for snacks and threatens to take over the planet, to be poor raw material for an upbeat musical.

But for audiences seeking a dark musical comedy with catchy songs, “Little Shop of Horrors,” which opened Saturday at the Commonweal Theatre, fits the bill.

The show, written by Howard Ashman and Alan

Menken, was a Broadway and Hollywood hit, and with good reason. The music is an irresistible combination of girl group-pop and '60s R&B, given a showtune polish. The comedy is twisted, but is not threatening.

The Commonweal's production is directed by Hal Cropp, who made his Commonweal acting debut 20 years ago in the company's first “Little Shop.” For this revival, Cropp said he wanted to focus more on some of the sinister aspects of the story, primarily the way

in which innocent heads can be turned by the prospect of fame and fortune.

For that, he would need a convincing Seymour, the store clerk who nurtures the plant-turned-beast known as Audrey II. Cropp has exactly that actor in Stan Peal who, in just a couple of seasons in Lanesboro has proven that he can bring a refined touch to any role, from drama to comedy — and here demonstrates that he can, as Seymour, carry a musical as well.

Opposite Peal is Stef Dick-

ens as Seymour's crush, Audrey. Like Peal, Dickens shows that her range includes musical comedy.

Providing musical commentary throughout the show are the trio of Irene ErkenBrack, Carla Joseph and Claire Kenning. David Hennessey is the disheveled store owner, Mr. Mushnik, with Gary Danciu playing (and overplaying) several characters, including a demented dentist. Brandon Grayson and Daniel Stock share the most delectable role: Audrey II.

If you go

“Little Shop of Horrors” continues through Oct. 28 at the Commonweal Theatre in Lanesboro. For tickets, call 1-800-657-7025 or go to www.commonwealththeatre.org.

While “Little Shop” is not the meatiest (pardon the pun) show ever tackled by the Commonweal, it's still good summertime entertainment.

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