

“FFFFFFFFFED ME!”

Long before the words “cult movie” existed, Roger Corman’s 1960 film *The Little Shop of Horrors* came along and pretty much defined those words. Filmed in only two days (on sets left over from another movie) on a miniscule budget that today probably wouldn’t pay for the craft service table on a movie set, somehow all the elements—a truly witty script by Charles B. Griffiths, a wonderful cast, including Jonathan Haze, Mel Welles, Jackie Joseph, Dick Miller, and a young Jack Nicholson, and let’s-get-it-done direction by Corman—came together to make an inspired comedy. The film played the bottom half of two double bills—first with Mario Bava’s *Black Sunday*, and, a year later, with *The Last Woman On Earth*. But it wasn’t those lower-half showings where it found its success—no, it was local TV broadcasts that made *Little Shop* a cult movie phenomenon. That’s where most people discovered it, and is certainly where I discovered it one late night.

And what a discovery it was. I, like others, howled with laughter, then immediately told all my friends they had to catch it. I’m suspecting that was a fairly common occurrence with this film—and word grew and grew. I remember going to a sold-out midnight screening in Westwood in the early 1970s, where the film got incredible reaction. And so it has been ever since—thanks to home video, the film, which was never copyrighted and is in the public domain, has been released by a whole slew of companies on VHS and DVD, in bad transfers, decent transfers, colorized transfers—perhaps it will even make it to Blu-Ray one of these fine days.

The film is filled with memorable sequences that are genuinely funny, none more so than Jack Nicholson’s turn as a dental patient who loves pain (“No Novocain—it dulls the senses”). Even the character names are smile inducing: Seymour Krelboin, Gravis Mushnick, Audrey Fulquard, Burson Fouch, Wilbur Force, and on and on. The dialogue throughout the film is filled with quotable lines, some of them worthy of Ionesco.

“Look at it, it grows like a cold sore from the lip.”

“I’ve got to go home. My wife’s making gardenias for dinner.”

Audrey, Jr. “Give me food!”

Seymour: “Aw, take it easy Dracula, what do you think I’m carrying here, my dirty laundry?”

“It’s a finger of speech.”

“I’m just crazy about Kosher flowers.”

“FFFFFFFFEED ME!” REDUX

In 1982, as if the cult of *Little Shop* wasn’t big enough, Alan Menken and Howard Ashman’s musical version of the film had its world premiere at the WPA Theater (then moving to the Orpheum). It was an instant smash hit, played all over the world, and was then itself turned into a film, bringing the *Little Shop* saga full circle. Not bad for a low-budget two-day comedy that has endured as a one-of-a-kind classic.

The score to *Little Shop* was written by Fred Katz. Katz, born in 1919, was a child prodigy on both piano and cello, but would become a well-known cellist

in the Los Angeles music scene of the 1950s—the first really to take the cello into the jazz arena. He became part of the very unique Chico Hamilton Quintet and was both heard and seen in the film *Sweet Smell Of Success*. Katz also became an A&R man for Decca Records, and also had several albums under his own name. At some point in the late 1950s, Corman found Katz or Katz found Corman and the two collaborated on several films, including *A Bucket Of Blood*, *The Wasp Woman*, *Ski Troop Attack*, *Little Shop*, and *Creature From The Haunted Sea*.

Katz’s score for *Little Shop* suits the film perfectly. I could analyze each cue for you, but somehow that just seems wrong. Fred Katz’s score speaks for itself—it’s funky, jazzy, beat, weird, crazy—and perfect accompaniment for a large plant that continually bellows

“FFFFFFFFEED ME!”

— Bruce Kimmel