

CHICAGO'S HILARIOUS HIT MUSICAL

"HILARIOUS"
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"BOOK OF MORMON"
"FUNNY" ★★★★★
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Jersey Boys



TIES THAT BIND
Michael Lomenda, Bwarie, Boyd and John Gardiner all got the memo.



Bank of America Theatre

(see Touring shows). Book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice. Music by Bob Gaudio. Lyrics by Bob Crewe. Dir. Des McAnuff. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 35mins; one intermission.

When this jukebox biography of the Four Seasons opened its first Chicago production in 2007, after winning the Tony Award for best musical in 2006, I was underwhelmed, to say the least. It was pleasurable enough to hear the Seasons' great hits, from "Sherry" to "Walk Like a Man," re-created by talented impressionists with solid musical direction, but the storytelling struck me as sub-*Behind the Music*.

Given the chance for a second assessment with the national tour's nine-week stop, I'm somewhat more won

over. I still find Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice's book scenes to be lazy and hamfisted. Information is delivered almost solely via narration; interactions are built entirely of one-liners and cliché.

But pulling back from the trees to see the forest, I have to admire the book's structure, which neatly splits the group's rise and fall into four, yes, seasons, with narrating duties similarly divvied among the four Seasons. If their dialogue and transitions are clunky (and they are), Brickman and Elice do deserve credit for laying out the story in a way that efficiently and persistently drives us toward the next musical number, which really is the point. And those numbers are as polished as ever. The touring cast members sell them with all they've got, led by appealing, dark-eyed falsettoist Joseph Leo Bwarie as Frankie Valli and charming, baby-faced Preston Truman Boyd as songwriting Season Bob Gaudio. —*Kris Vire*

Little Shop of Horrors



Street Tempo Theatre (see Fringe & storefront). Book and lyrics by Howard Ashman. Music by Alan Menken. Dirs. Brian Posen and Kory Danielson. With ensemble cast. 2hrs; one intermission.

The major twist in Street Tempo Theatre's "darkly reimagined" production of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken's camp send-up of '60s horror is that it takes its killer plant from outer space way too seriously. Directors Brian Posen and Kory Danielson scrap the traditional cheeky puppets and recast Audrey II (Candace Edwards) as a human, dolled up in sinister harlequin makeup and instructed to lurk around the upstage wall looking severe and menacing while, you know... being a plant.

That same draining, macabre aesthetic carries over to Mushnik's flower shop (filled with dead flowers) and the residents of Skid Row (ranging from heroin chic to *Walking Dead*). Reinventing *Little Shop* could be tempting—it's the sort of musical whose success has secured one definitive look, from Audrey's (Erin Creighton) adorable pip-squeak dialect to the play's tongue-in-cheek tone. But



SOMEWHERE THAT'S (DARK) GREEN Creighton and John Sessler navigate Skid Row.

Posen, a major player in Chicago's improv scene, works against his comedic instincts in favor of needless innovation. In other words, if it ain't broke, it probably doesn't need to be slathered in *Threepenny Opera* makeup.

Still, Street Tempo's production marks a rare occasion when a lack of cohesion is a good thing. While Posen and Danielson are overthinking, their cast is gleefully belting, doo-wopping and dancing circles around all the directorial decadence, none more than Krystal Metcalfe, Sharriese Hamilton and Will Hoyer as some fierce Motown hookers. With some sound issues fixed, there's a formidable *Little Shop* here. You just have to bushwhack first. —*Dan Jakes*

PHOTOS: TOP, JOAN MARCUS; BOTTOM, LINDA GARTZ