

Teaching guide: Area of study 2 (Popular music)

Study piece

Little Shop of Horrors (1982) off-Broadway version – the following three tracks:

- Prologue/Little Shop of Horrors (overture)
- Mushnik and Son
- Feed Me.

Please note we are unable to reproduce sections of the score and the song lyrics due to copyright restrictions.

Contextual information

Little Shop of Horrors first appeared as a low budget film in 1960: The story involves a plant which feeds on human blood and tissue. The main characters include:

- Mushnik – the owner of the florist shop, who treats his staff badly
- Seymour and Audrey – florist shop assistants
- Orin – Audrey’s abusive dentist boyfriend
- Chiffon, Crystal and Ronnette – a trio of street urchins who comment on the action as the story progresses
- Audrey II – the plant.

The version on which this guide is written for is the off-Broadway 1982 production. An off-Broadway production is one in a professional theatre venue in New York City with a seated audience capacity between 100 and 499, inclusive. These theatres are smaller than Broadway theatres, but larger than ‘off-off’ Broadway theatres, which seat fewer than 100: Some shows that premiere off-Broadway are subsequently produced on Broadway. A Broadway production takes place in a professional theatre with a seated audience capacity of more than 500 seats.

After the 1982 production, there have been subsequent productions worldwide of *Little Shop of Horrors* and the musical was also made into a 1986 film, directed by Frank Oz.

The music for this 1982 off-Broadway production of *Little Shop of Horrors* was composed by Alan Menken (b.1949). He is, perhaps, best known for his work for Disney studios, composing scores for *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Enchanted* and *Tangled*, amongst others.

The lyrics for this 1982 off-Broadway production of *Little Shop of Horrors* were written by the playwright Howard Ashman (1950-1991), who worked with Menken at Disney studios and is credited in being a major force in the ‘Disney Renaissance’ of the late 1980s and produced critically and commercially successful animated films that were mostly based on well-known stories.

Little Shop of Horrors is a horror-comedy rock musical.

Prologue and Little Shop of Horrors

Prologue/Little Shop of Horrors (overture) is available on [YouTube](#) (0:00-0:43) (0:44-2:05) and also [Spotify](#).

Context

The opening number of the show (*Prologue*) is designed to set the tone and bring a sense of gravity and foreboding.

The *Prologue* has a time signature of 4/4, a tempo of c.80 bpm, and a tonic key of Eb major. The opening drum roll gets gradually louder (crescendo), introducing the opening, loud (forte), homophonic/chordal first phrase of music. Slow moving, simple rhythms of crotchets, minims and semibreves together with the organ give a hymn-like feel. Melodically, the initial two-bar idea is treated sequentially, with the accompanying bass and toms fanfare-like motif adding even more gravitas. Dotted crotchet/quaver rhythms are introduced in the bass to add to the anticipation. The supporting chords are diatonic, with the first two-bar phrase starting on an Eb major chord and ending on a C minor chord, and the next three-bar phrase starting on an F minor chord and ending on a Bb major chord, before the music gets gradually quieter (decrescendo/diminuendo) and the narration begins.

The opening section is then repeated (without the initial drum-roll) to form a nine-bar section, but the final chord is changed to a D major chord. After a drum fill, we are straight into the next song.

The song *Little Shop of Horrors* is performed by the three street urchins – Crystal, Ronette and Chiffon. The mood of the music now changes, with an upbeat tempo of c.160 bpm, a time signature of 4/4 and a modulation to the key of G major. The song is accompanied by piano, keyboard, guitar, bass and percussion. The organ sound is not heard in the song.

This upbeat/easy style of music has been likened to ‘bugglegum pop’ from the 1960s, which is known for its innocent singsong melodies, often harmonised vocals and the use of pentatonic scales. The accompanying chords were usually simple, with perhaps a childish and lyrical hook. The style was marketed for children and adolescents, and songs of this genre include ‘Yummy, Yummy, Yummy’ by the Ohio Express and ‘Sugar, Sugar’ by The Archies.

Whilst the time signature of 4/4 remains the same as the *Prologue*, a feature of the song *Little Shop of Horrors* is the use of the accompanying calypso/tresillo or ‘332’. This rhythmic pattern is heard across a wide range of musical styles, for example, in Latin American music and pop songs.



Structure

Introduction	Section A	Section A	Section B	Section A	Coda/Outro
4 bars	8 bars	8 bars	22 bars	6 bars	4 bars

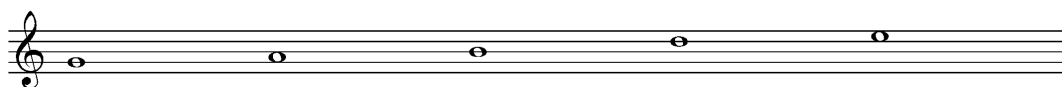
The loud (*forte*) four-bar instrumental introduction sets up the four chords, which are then repeated for the majority of Section A. Harmonically, the chords in this section are based around G, Am7, D7sus, and D7/F#, with the addition of a characterful, non-diatonic C minor chord. The section ends (like it starts) on the tonic chord of G major.

The majority of the song is melody and accompaniment texture, with some use of homophonic/chordal texture in the Coda/Outro section.

The initial vocal line is sung in unison by the three female voices, with the lyrics set syllabically. The rising and falling minor 3rd and the repeated notes are both features of the initial two-bar phrase, which is sung three times. A two-note syncopated pattern ends the section, emphasising the repeated words.

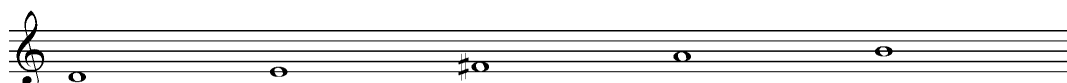
The repeat of Section A sees the vocalists sing in close three-part harmonies, using typical 3rds and 6ths, with the middle vocal line making use of the notes of G major pentatonic scale. Both the harmony singing, and the use of the pentatonic scale are common features of 'bugglegum pop'.

G major pentatonic



Section B is unusually 22-bars long, not the expected 8/12/16 bar unit. Harmonically, the type of chords used in the accompaniment now include 6th chords. The three-part harmony singing continues with use of the D major pentatonic scale in the top vocal line.

D major pentatonic



A three-bar melody begins with the interval of a minor 3rd and the use of repeated notes, before becoming more scalic as it descends at the end of the phrase. There is then a bar of shouting before the phrase is then repeated twice more with different lyrics. The reference to 'Sturm und Drang' (storm and stress) in the lyrics refers to the artistic movement from the eighteenth century, meaning something that is stressful/emotional, and in this song, it is the sense that there may be trouble ahead. A small chromatic figure is used in the middle of the section, after which the band plays a strident five-note plus three-note accompaniment figure, before the music begins to gradually get louder (*crescendo*) over a minor chord before resolving.

The initial melody then repeats (as per the original section A), supported by a punchy, two-bar rhythmic pattern in the loud/very loud (*forte/fortissimo*) band accompaniment. Harmonically, sus4 chords are added before the final four-bar Coda/Outro.

A syncopated, melodic ostinato is created in the final section, with the use of repeated notes emphasising the lyrics, before the song ends unconventionally on G major vocals over Eb major instruments, which creates a sense of unease for what is to follow next.

Mushnik and Son

Mushnik and Son available on [YouTube](#) (12:21-14:01) and [Spotify](#).

Context

Audrey II (the plant) has brought Mushnik and his florist's shop both publicity and a booming business. Orin (Audrey's boyfriend) tries to persuade Seymour to leave, taking Audrey II with him, to make his own fortune. Mushnik realises that this is a threat to his new-found wealth and fame and offers to adopt Seymour and give him a business partnership. Seymour seems unaware of Mushnik's selfish motives (made in comments throughout the song) and naïvely accepts his offer.

The song is sung by Mushnik (baritone voice) and Seymour (tenor voice). The band accompaniment consists of piano, keyboards, electric guitar, bass guitar and drum kit. Castanets and an organ timbre/sonority are also used.

Mushnik is portrayed as Jewish and there are features of klezmer music in the song. Klezmer music relates to music which draws on centuries-old Jewish traditions and incorporates various sounds of music from European and international traditions, including Roma (gypsy) music, Eastern European folk music (particularly Russian music) and early jazz. This type of music became popular in the USA in the twentieth century and was a direct result of a fusion between the increasing Jewish immigration and the American jazz scene.

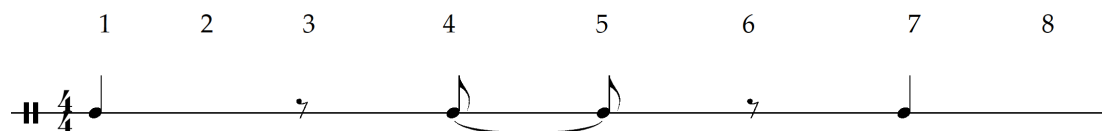
Musical features of Klezmer music in this song include the use include the 4/4 metre, the fast tempo, and the use of the harmonic minor scale (C minor in this song). Harmonically, the addition of the flattened supertonic chord (Db major) is also a characteristic, as well as the typical rhythmic anacrusis. The use of castanets, and the organ sonority/timbre links to a Klezmer band.

Structure

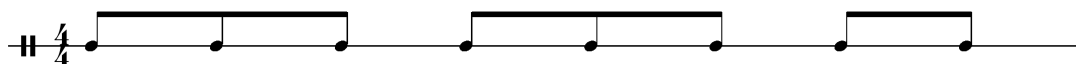
Mushnik and Son has a time signature of 4/4, a tempo of c.160 bpm and a tonic key of C minor. Following the softly (piano) spoken dialogue between Mushnik and Seymour, the structure of the song is as follows:

Verse 1 Verse 2 Chorus Verse 3 Chorus

The accompanying calypso/tresillo or '332' rhythm is also a significant rhythmic feature of this piece.



In the chorus section, the repeated quavers in the piano provide rhythmic contrast. Indeed, the piano opening of *Clocks* by Coldplay uses the same rhythmic feel.



The first sung phrase of Verse 1 is sung fairly-loudly (*mezzo forte*) and begins with an anacrusis. Apart from the initial rising perfect 4th, the melody of the opening phrase is mostly scalar/conjunct. The second phrase starts in the same way, then has a slight change of melodic extension and rhythmic syncopation. The lyric setting in both phrases is syllabic, with the regular and rapid use of quavers a feature of the melodic line. Apart from the initial opening of the first phase, which is a monophonic/single melodic line texture, the rest of the verse is melody and accompaniment texture. The chords change every two bars in the first part of the verse between the tonic chord (C minor) to the flattened supertonic chord (Db major). The bass uses the strong calypso/tressilo '332' rhythm (as heard in the song *Little Shop of Horrors*) with additional syncopated material at the same time.

Verse 2 has the same musical features as Verse 1 but has different lyrics and more vocal interaction between Mushnik and Seymour. At the end of Verse 2, there is a seven-note homophonic/chordal melodic figure, which is a melodic inversion of the opening notes of Verse 1/2.

An ascending glissando in the piano leads into the four-note hook of the song at the start of the chorus, which, lyrically, is the title of the song. The gradual increase in volume (*crescendo*) over this phrase is also apparent. The melodic writing is now more disjunct, with the use of 6th and 7th intervals and the use of a descending sequence towards the end of the first phrase. The chords now also change (nearly always) once per bar, with more major chords used. This section has slower moving regular and syncopated rhythms patterns.

A modulation to the relative major (Eb major) occurs about halfway through the section, emphasised melodically with the use of minims and the rising minor 7th. The lyric setting remains syllabic, as does the overall texture of melody and accompaniment, with the section ending with the reoccurrence of the seven-note homophonic/chordal melodic inversion figure. The strong calypso/'tressilo '332' rhythm remains in place, with the addition of repeated quaver chords in the piano part.

Verse three uses the same musical material from verses one and two with more lyrical concentration on father figures.

The final chorus starts with a gradual increase in volume (*crescendo*) with Musnik and Seymour singing either solo or in unison. As the song nears its conclusion, syncopated motifs with the use of repeated notes are used both in the vocal melody (on the parodies of the wedding vows) and in the subsequent bars of band accompaniment. The song ends with a drawn-out very loud (*fortissimo*) *Mushnik and Son*, followed by a typical Klezmer flourish of an eight-note chromatic scale, which leads to the tonic note C and a final band chord of C minor.

The band uses rhythmically different accompaniment patterns. Both the verses and the choruses use the strong calypso/tressilo '332' rhythm again (as heard in the song *Little Shop of Horrors*) with additional rhythmic syncopation above. The chorus has the syncopation replaced with repeated quaver movement.

Feed me/Git it

Feed me/Git it available on [YouTube](#) (20:10-25:05) and [Spotify](#).

Context

This musical number is sung by Audrey II (the plant) to Seymour. Seymour has been secretly feeding Audrey II by pricking his finger to give the plant blood. He is complaining about feeling faint and hungry when suddenly, the plant speaks to him for the first time.

The song is sung by Seymour and Audrey II (the plant). The band accompaniment consists of piano, keyboards, electric guitar, bass guitar and drum kit. A strings timbre/sonority is heard in the opening section (*Sudden Changes*).

There are several ways to describe the overall structure of this song and any viable or justified answer by a candidate in the exam would be credited.

The way the form is described here is one possible response of a repeated AABA form (after a long introduction (*Sudden Changes*)) and with a Gospel section added in the middle. Another viable or justifiable way of describing the form would be through composed.

The breakdown below uses the repeated AABA form, with the timings referenced to the YouTube link above.

Introduction		20:10	Sudden changes ending with a monologue.
Verse 1:	A1	21:21	Audrey II asking to be fed to grow.
	A2	22:20	Audrey II lists items to tempt Seymour.
	B	22:41	Audrey II tries to entice Seymour both as a genie and a friend.
	A2	22:55	Audrey II provokes Seymour to 'Git it'.
Gospel section:		23:04	Compound time section - Seymour reveals his doubts.
Verse 2:	A1	23:32	Audrey II lists more items to tempt Seymour.
	A2	23:48	Hints of Seymour being tempted.
	B (part)	23:57	Persuasion complete.
	Dialogue	24:10	Realisation from Seymour that Audrey II is talking about Orin (Audrey's boyfriend).
	B	24:30	Setting a rationale.

The introduction begins slowly in the key of C major, with a tempo of c.60 bpm. Unusually for this key, the starting chord is a piano spread chord of Ab major, with the sustained strings sonority/timbre adding to the calm, reflective character. Seymour sings in a parlando style (which means freely, following natural speech patterns). The vocal line is supported by long chords in the accompaniment, where the band would follow the singer *colla voce* (with the voice).

Seymour sings two conjunct, seven-note, arch-shaped phrases fairly quietly (*mezzo piano*). Both phrases are almost identical, but the first phrase uses an Eb as its highest note (over an Ab major chord) and the second phrase uses an E natural as its highest note (over an C major chord). The use of repeated notes and a descending sequence completes the six-bar section melodically. Two syncopated piano bars lead into a repeat of the initial musical ideas, with more intricate pianistic accompaniment after the lyric 'Petunia', before the ensuing syncopated melody when Seymour looks ahead and remembers who he will 'owe it all to'. The chord changes are slow-moving and the inverted C pedal is a feature of the harmonic writing.

Seymour then embarks on an underscored Monologue about possible health problems, before saying that he is hungry and is going out for food. Audrey II (the plant) then speaks and asks for fresh blood.



The riff/ostinato for *Feed me* consists of two repeated quavers on the first beat of the bar, which could call to mind the famous two-note theme of *Jaws* by John Williams. After a three-bar introduction, Audrey II sings the initial melody which contains the notes Bb and Eb which are found in the blues scale of C.

The tempo has now changed to c.96 bpm, whilst the time signature remains in 4/4 time. The repetitive two-note *Feed me* riff/ostinato drives the music forward, with chromatic notes in the band accompaniment adding to the surreal mood. The structure of Verse 1 is 12 bar blues.

In Verse 1 A2 there is now a more Motown feel to the music. Motown's name was rooted in industry and community: a nod to the *Motor Town* nickname of Detroit, which, in the early 1960s, was the car producing capital of USA. Features of Motown in this section include the characterful, syncopated bass playing and the fast chord changes, as well as the strong, steady beat.

Section B starts with three slow-moving bars with regular bass accompaniment, but then the chords abruptly change in terms of pace, leading to the lyric 'crave'. Over these fast-moving chords, Audrey II's melody uses regular semiquaver movement, with the use of repeated notes to reinforce the lyrics. A descending glissando in the piano is heard before the two-note riff/ostinato accompaniment returns before the final 'Git it' (get it).

There is then a definite change of musical style to Gospel/Gospel Blues in Section B. As its name suggests, Gospel Music came directly from Christian church music and was to have an enormous influence on popular music of the 1960s. It had a unique and distinctive musical style – using piano or Hammond organ, tambourines, driving bass lines, and gospel-influenced vocal harmonies.

This section is in compound time (either 6/8 or 12/8 time) and is sung by Seymour. The music has modulated to A minor (which is the relative minor of C major). The

colla voce vocal writing style has returned here, with the use of some melismatic word-setting on the words 'know', 'so' and 'strong'.

Both the improvised guitar phrases and the wailing organ are characteristic features of the musical style used here. Just over half-way through the section, the descending chromatic chords are reinforced with a cross-rhythm/triplet rhythm, before the section ends with repetitive dissonant chords, emphasising Seymour's unease.

The two-note riff/ostinato pattern with the change to a 4/4 time signature now signals the return to the original Blues style heard at the beginning of the number. The song in Verse 2 is now much more a question and answer style duet between an increasingly confident Audrey II and a wavering Seymour. The rhythmic intensity of the accompaniment builds up to the ending lyric about people dying.

Seymour is only finally convinced after witnessing a violent argument between Orin and Audrey, where the accompaniment bars are based upon the two-note riff/ostinato, which underscores the dialogue.

The intensity further develops, with the use of a four-note rising figure in the bass which gets gradually louder (*crescendo*). This begins as a monophonic/single melodic line, with other instruments playing in octaves in a homophonic/chordal texture building to the resumption of the vocal melody.

The agreement between Seymour and Audrey II is conveyed with repetition of the lyrics before the song then moves into the final eight-bar section, once again using the question and answer technique between Audrey II and Seymour. The musical material here is a development of material used earlier in the song and is based around the strong Blues compositional ideas heard in the first section played loudly/very loudly (*forte/fortissimo*). The song is brought to its conclusion with a final command from Audrey II and the two-note riff/ostinato one final time.