

Avenue Q



To say that puppetry as a theatrical art has a long history would be an understatement. An ancient art form, it is believed to have its origins some 30,000 years ago in Egypt. Puppetry was utilized in many cultures and civilizations, including ancient China, as well as Greece and Rome. In our own country, puppets have been a hugely popular part of our culture, from Howdy Doody to Sesame Street and The Muppet Show. They have been used to entertain and educate, making audiences laugh, learn cheer for many years. Now, Courthouse Center for the Arts is bringing to its stage some puppets who bring a very modern take to the puppet genre.

In 2003, puppets took the New York City theater scene by storm when the smash hit Avenue Q opened off Broadway at the Vineyard Theatre. Well reviewed, it was extended multiple times, winning a Lucille Lortel Award for Best New Musical. Later that year, it opened on Broadway, where it ran until 2009, then moving back off-Broadway and spawning a number of national touring productions. During the show's Broadway tenure, it won the Tony Award for Best Musical, Best Score and Best Book, the Tony "triple crown."

Avenue Q at the Courthouse will be the show's first Rhode Island production. It's story centers on a recent college graduate named Princeton who moves to New York City, where he is only able to find an apartment on the street of the title. There, he meets a colorful assortment of characters, including Kate, the girl next door, Rod, the Republican, Trekkie, the internet addict, Nicky, the slacker roommate, Brian, the aspiring comedian, and others.

The characters, some of whom are human and some of whom are puppets, sing about many of the problems they face. They are songs about familiar problems, which every audience member has either experienced or knows somebody who has experienced it. Titles include "It Sucks to Be Me," "My Girlfriend, Who Lives in Canada," "The Internet is for Porn," "Everyone's A Little Bit Racist," and "For now."

Puppets and humans alike examine these issues and others with wit, sarcasm and more than a little snark. Not appropriate for young children, the show has been critically acclaimed and beloved by adult audiences everywhere. It's also been described as "an ingenious combination of The Real World and Sesame Street" and "...how Friends might be if it had Fozzie Bear and Miss Piggy arguing about their one-night stand, but with more angst, expletives and full-on puppet sex."

Courthouse's production is directed by Richard Ericson, Director of the Courthouse Center for the Arts. Puppets for the show will be designed and made by local puppet master Nora Eschenheimer, while JonPaul Rainville will be the assistant director and choreographer and the musical director will be Lila Kane. In addition to the production of Avenue Q, there will be kid-friendly puppet programs during the run of this adult "puppet show". The downstairs galleries will display the marionette and puppet stage collection of Dan Butterworth throughout Avenue Q's run.

Avenue Q runs through March 11

at the Courthouse Center for the Arts

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