

# Review: Avenue Q by York Light Opera

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*The colourful cast*

## **York Light Opera Present – Avenue Q York Theatre Royal, June 25**

York Light Opera Company have produced a show that's a little different. *Avenue Q* has been around on Broadway since 2003 and has transferred all over the world.

Its creators have moved onto such projects as *The Book of Mormon* and the latest Disney juggernaut *Frozen*. I actually saw it on Broadway about five years. There it was amazing, but will this production impress me as much?

In essence this is a tale of a group of friends in New York, all living on the titular *Avenue Q*. But here is where the twist kicks in; all but three of the characters are puppets.

Yes, puppets, like *Sesame Street* (although legally nothing to do with *Muppets* or *Sesame Street*!).

This show is unique among puppet shows in that the puppeteers are on stage with the puppets. The only concession to them hiding is that they wear all black.

This may sound distracting but I found that it added to the show, it doesn't take long before you don't really notice the actors.



Our nominal hero is Princeton, a recent graduate who very quickly discovers that his BA in English is pretty worthless (don't I know it?!), who meets and falls for Kate Monster, a sweet natured teaching assistant who happens to be a monster (a cute and cuddly one).

*Avenue Q* is populated by such characters as Rod and Nicky – a closeted gay banker and his layabout roommate – comedian Brian and his other half, Japanese therapist Christmas Eve.

Not to mention Trekkie Monster, who gets the catchiest of all the songs in the show. You will know it when you hear it...

I haven't even told you about Gary Coleman yet: yes, that Gary Coleman, former child star of *Different Strokes*. He is the superintendent of their buildings, having hit on hard times.

Here Coleman is played by Lauren Charlton-Mathews, ably continuing the tradition of having the character played by a woman.

The cast in general dealt with the complicated issue of acting and puppetry very well. The standout for me was Alexa Chaplin as Kate Monster, who gave Kate the required personality while also adding subtle human touches acting alongside her.

I was also particularly impressed by Richard McDonald playing Nicky, a puppet who could have very easily just been Ernie, but excellent voice and puppet work kept that from happening.

The only major flaw of this production came from the crew. Unfortunately, several lighting cues were missed and there were a couple of microphone issues. I am nit-picking here, but the actors deserved better.

In short, *Avenue Q* is not a show to take the kids to, but I did see several older members of the audience chuckling away at songs such as *The Internet Is For Porn* and *Everyone's A Little Bit Racist*.

A consistently funny, well-acted and surprisingly sweet show, which probably won't show up York again anytime soon.

Definitely see it while you have the chance!

## **Review: Avenue Q, York Light Opera Company, York Theatre Royal,**

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Updated 11:50am Thursday 26th June 2014 in [Theatre](#)

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WELCOME to Avenue Q, the street for misfits, has-beens and a couple of monsters.

York Light Opera Company transforms York Theatre Royal's main stage into the American avenue with a West End-worthy set and a just-as-worthy cast of humans and puppets alike.

Avenue Q is totally random, and it's fantastic.

Princeton, a recent university graduate with a useless degree, joins the residents of Avenue Q and soon begins to look at life in a whole new way. Kate Monster and Lucy, The Slut throw a few spanners in the works as Princeton tries to find his purpose in life, meeting new neighbours Rod, Nicky, Brian, Christmas Eve, Trekkie Monster and Gary Coleman along the way.

A side-splitting script from Robert Lopez and Jess Marx combines with an animated cast of puppets and actors, with fantastic direction from Martyn Knight and assistant director Sue Hawksworth. The result is a musical which is laugh-out-loud hilarious from start to finish.

The whole thing is outrageous, with songs like *Everyone's A Little Bit Racist* and *The Internet Is For Porn* dominating this fast-paced and quick-witted production.

Dancing boxes, a porn-obsessed parody of the Cookie Monster and a puppet so sexy she could rival Jennifer Rabbit form a whirlwind production full of sex, porn and warped happiness.

Schadenfreude shines light on the little bit of darkness inside all of us, with Gary Coleman (Lauren Charlton-Mathews) taking the reins. The dead-pan faces of the actors make these songs even more hysterical.

Never have I heard such roaring laughter from an audience, and never has it been so warranted. The joy of such an easy-going production is that the few minor blips in sound and lighting were easily overturned by the fun of the performance.

Alexa Chaplin is mesmerising as Kate Monster, her facial expressions are acute and intelligent yet totally in sync with the movements of her puppet. Richard Blackburn is equally impressive as Princeton, with his puppet and his own physical embodiment of Princeton flawlessly in tune. With puppets at the core of the production, this faultless puppetry give the musical its force.

Alicia Stabler's deep tones are sassy and seductive as she takes on Lucy, The Slut with perfect poise. The musical accompaniment to her entrance creates a sensual atmosphere in mere moments, and Stabler's confident American accent carries alluring intonations in almost every word. Trekkie Monster fancies the pants off of Lucy, and Stabler makes it pretty clear why.

Be warned of the adult themes and sexual references, but certainly don't be deterred by them.

Avenue Q is a step out of the box for York Light Opera Company, but if it is a sign of things to come I'd keep my eye on them. In fact, I wouldn't take it off of them.

Cheesy and crude and wonderfully entertaining, the cast do this West-End production real justice with knock-out performances throughout. All in all, a roaring success.

*Avenue Q, York Light Opera Company, York Theatre Royal*