

24 June 2011 14:38

Daily Male

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Culture

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Interviews

Reviews

Features

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## Entertainment : Culture : Reviews

### Avenue Q

02 Jul 2009

Rating: ★★★★★

Queer Content: ★★★★★

Hunk/Babe Factor: ★★★★★ For the humans, *not* the puppets!

What does the Q in *Avenue Q* stand for? People might tell you that it stands for an outer district of New York so far down the alphabet that it's actually off the map, but it also stands for its bright mix of quirky and queer characters. For instance, there's the porn-loving Trekkie Monster, washed-out former child star Gary Coleman, Japanese out-of-work therapist Christmas Eve and let's not forget closeted homosexual Rod – see, we literally mean queer.

It's clearly not kiddie stuff, but *Avenue Q* addresses things like one night stands, unemployment, coming out and racism via a *Sesame Street*-style form of education, using both puppets and humans to tell the story. Having just relocated to the Gielgud Theatre after a successful three-year run at the Noel Coward Theatre, it's time to give *Avenue Q* a fresh look.

22 year old Princeton arrives at *Avenue Q* with doubts that his recently acquired BA in English will get him anywhere in life. (Um, hello? I did alright!) He sets out to find his purpose and along the way manages to get himself tangled up in a love triangle between girl next door Kate Monster and nightclub entertainer Lucy the Slut.

Meanwhile, Bert and Ernie twosome Rod and Nicky are having problems of their own. Upright Rod is hopelessly in love with Nicky and, in between pouring his little heart out to Christmas Eve, he hides himself firmly in the proverbial closet by regaling his friends with the musical story of 'My Girlfriend, Who Lives in Canada'. The very talented Daniel Boys portrays both Rod and Princeton with sensitivity and wit, not only bringing the puppets to life, but also giving them distinct personalities and emotional centres.

Stand out performer Julie Atherton plays Kate Monster with just the right mix of pep and neurosis, and provides *Avenue Q* with one of its genuinely touching moments in which she sings about unrequited love in the heartfelt number 'There's a Fine, Fine Line'. Like Boys, Atherton shows her diversity by effortlessly interchanging between Kate Monster and the Jessica Rabbit-style vamp Lucy the Slut.

Jessica Ampil shines in the role of Christmas Eve, providing comic relief as well as heart, particularly with her glorious torch song 'When You Ruv Someone'. She is the voice of reason and advice on the avenue, and, by breaking out into an insanely catchy sing-a-long, she helps the characters reach the simple and reassuring conclusion that everyone's a little dissatisfied in life and compromise is the key to a realistic sense of happiness.

Yes, it's feel-good and schmaltzy, but the songwriting team of Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx balance that out with wicked humour, notably Trekkie Monster's ode to the wonders of internet *porn* and everybody's favourite song 'Everyone's a Little Bit Racist'. Oh, and did we mention there's a puppet sex scene?

It's worth taking a stroll to *Avenue Q* and checking out its surreal take on real life. And, if you've already seen it, retrace your steps. Like its children's show format, this is a musical that doesn't seem to get old.

#### Gallery



*Avenue Q*, by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx  
 Gielgud Theatre  
 Shaftesbury Avenue  
 London W1  
 020 7494 5065 / [www.gielgud-theatre.com](http://www.gielgud-theatre.com)

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