



Entertainment

The angels of Avenue Q

By Bobby Garcia (The Philippine Star) Updated March 07, 2010 12:00 AM



They are (from left) Rachel Alejandro, Frenchie Dy, Aiza Seguerra and Thea Tadiar

MANILA, Philippines - One of the great joys I have had directing *Avenue Q* over the last three years has been working with some of the most talented female artists in the country. Rachel Alejandro, Aiza Seguerra, Frenchie Dy and Thea Tadiar are truly in a class of their own when it comes to talent, discipline and generosity.

Rachel Alejandro — I first met Rachel in 2000 when we were looking for someone to play Mimi in the Singapore run of *Rent*. She came into audition and blew us all away. Of course, I had heard Rachel sing many times before then and had always admired her skill and the unique quality of her voice. Right then and there, we cast her as Mimi and she took Singapore by storm (and Manila, too when *Rent* returned later that year). The *Singapore Straits Time* called her Mimi, "Better than Broadway!" When we first announced that we were doing *Avenue Q*, I was thrilled when her manager, Girlie Rodis, told me that it was one of

Rachel's favorite shows and that she wanted to audition for the dual roles of Kate Monster/Lucy The Slut. There was a slight glitch though. Rachel was not going to be in Manila during the scheduled auditions. Thank God for technology and the Internet. Rachel sent in her audition video via *YouTube* and the rest, as they say, is history. Rachel went on to receive critical praise and an Aliw Award for her performance in *Avenue Q*. I honestly believe that Rachel is one of the most underrated performers in the country. Over the last three years we have become good friends, and she has shared with me her love for musical theater. Having done recordings, performed in concerts and TV shows and acted in movies, it is her work in musical theater that she is proudest of. It is also, ultimately, what she feels she was meant to do.

And I couldn't be happier that the theatrical stage is home to her. I enjoy working with people who are extremely obsessive compulsive. And that, Rachel is. She takes each note you give her seriously and makes sure she comes in the next day having incorporated all the changes from the day before. And she brings with her a thrilling voice you could listen to all day. After *Avenue Q*, Rachel will be putting on leg warmers and roller skates (Good luck, Rachel!) as she takes on the lead role in the zany musical comedy *Xanadu* which opens in September. In *Xanadu*, Rachel will sing hit Olivia Newton-John songs such as *Suddenly*, *Magic* and *Have You Never Been Mellow*. I enjoy working with Rachel so much that I have already blocked off some of her time next year for more musical theater projects.

Aiza Seguerra — I first worked with Aiza many, many years ago during the Centennial Launch in Clark. It was a cast of thousands but Aiza clearly stood out above the rest. She was genuine to everyone around her and knew what she needed to do when she got on the stage. She wasted no one's time and made herself pretty much invisible when it wasn't her turn to perform (despite the fact that we had no running water and were swarmed by mosquitoes). But come performance time, you could clearly see that it was what she was meant to do.

When we were casting the role of Gary Coleman, Aiza was really our one and only choice. We thought that it would give the show an added dimension if we hired someone who was also a child star. But unlike Coleman, Aiza grew up to be one of the country's most respected singers and songwriters. Aiza had previously worked on *The Rocky Horror Show* with us where we all had a wickedly fun time. When Aiza came into audition, she wasn't too sure what *Avenue Q* was all about. She also had numerous concert and TV commitments she needed to reshuffle if she returned to theater. I think what sold her on the idea of doing the show was when I told her that there was to be full puppet

nudity. Aiza sang her song *Schadenfreude* in auditions and nailed it. She nailed it not by luck, but because she is a pro.

Aiza comes to rehearsals prepared and ready to go. And through each run of *Avenue Q* she has added more nuances and has allowed Coleman to grow — all within the constraints of the story. Add to that the fact that she is one of the most pleasant and authentic performers you could work with.

Frenchie Dy — Although I had been a judge for one of the early rounds of *Star In A Million* during the year that Frenchie won, I never actually saw her performances nor did I see her winning moment. But one evening, I was working on my computer and had the TV on in the background. A fantastic voice started to sing *Day by Day* from *Godspell* and I turned up the volume and paid some attention. It was *Star In A Million* winner Frenchie Dy. What a voice!

We asked her to learn Christmas Eve's Act Two aria *The More You Ruv Someone*. Frenchie came to auditions, a bundle of nerves, but sang the heck out of the song. Working with Frenchie over the last three years has shown me how wonderful a person she is. She brings of the biggest hearts to rehearsals each day. And, in case I haven't said it enough, what a voice! I look forward to seeing Frenchie take on more roles in musical theater. There is so much this girl can do!

Thea Tadiar — When in crisis, it is good to know someone like Thea. Or better yet, it is good to know Thea Tadiar. Thea joined the third run of *Avenue Q* mid-rehearsal with one day's notice and a week before re-opening the show. Luckily, her husband Rycharde Everley was playing Brian at that time, so she was familiar with the show. But there was so much she had to learn in a week's time — music, lines and some complicated puppetry. Of everyone in the cast, Thea works the most puppets. And Thea, being the amazing trooper that she is, mastered it all in one week. Not only did she learn it, but she was fantastic in all her roles. She is the type of actor who you don't have to worry about in rehearsals. You see her putting all the pieces of the puzzle together without the need to be handheld all throughout. And, being a music major, she has the wonderful habit of making sure everyone around her is singing the right notes and making sure they knew if they weren't. Thea did an equally amazing job as Marcy Park in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. Although she now lives in London with her family, she is returning to us for a short while to perform in this run of *Avenue Q*. I looked forward to the next time we get to work together.

It has been a joy working with these four ladies, whom I fondly call *Avenue Q's* Angels. They join their male counterparts Felix Rivera, Joel Trinidad and Calvin Millado for this, the fifth run of the musical. Both Chari Arespacochaga and I are extremely lucky because *Avenue Q* has had a dream cast throughout its multiple runs (both men and women). Although not performing in this run, Everley, Teenee Chan and Carla Guevara-Laforteza have also breathed dynamic life into the show.

We hope you will join us as we open Atlantis Productions' 2010 Season with the show you asked us to bring back (and we're glad we did!), *Avenue Q*.

Avenue Q runs from March 12 to 27 at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati City. Tickets are on sale now by calling Atlantis Productions at 892-7078 or 840-1187.

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