

## Avenue Q: A puppetland you'd be happy to get lost into

Written by Rochelle C. Pangilinan | AJPress

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*Sesame Street crossed with Rent. This is how Avenue Q is described in its official press release. However, seeing the show live last March 10 on its special press preview would make one think that description is not enough to cover what the show really is.*

*True, for those who grew up with Sesame Street and related to the many issues the main characters in *Rent* faced, the description is apt... but not really enough. It seems like the genius songwriting team of Jeff Marx and Robert Lopez took the good elements of TV shows like*

*Friends*

*, (friends iving in close proximity have formed special bonds) and*

*Ally McBeal*

*(the idealist who refuses to give into life's temporary joys, instead seeks out joys which are meaningful and lasting). Ask anyone who have seen the show on its previous runs and they may say differently. As a matter of fact, when the show debuted on Broadway in August 2003, Ben Brantley, one of New York's premiere theater critics, likened the show to the musical*

*West Side Story*

*. A bit of a stretch, many would say, but pretty much on the mark when you really think about it—minus the tragic ending of course.*

*Avenue Q is set in New York and focuses on listless individuals trying to find their place in the big and often cruel world, which is reminiscent of "Rent," except that these individuals come in the form of cuddly and furry puppets who are given to life by talented actors and actresses. These individuals deal with the biggest issue which face the youth, regardless of what generation they belong into: finding one's life purpose. Throw in issues of being stuck in career limbo and financial hell, homosexuality, racism, platonic and sexual relationships and even porn addiction presented in form of bubbly songs which will sort of remind you of Sesame Street*

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*and you know there isn't any dull moment.*

*"Avenue Q" first hit the local stage back in 2007 and has had three sold-out runs since then plus a hit run at the Esplanade Theater in Singapore in 2008. Now, this Tony Award-winning musical will once again captivate the Philippine audience beginning March 12 until March 27 under the direction of theater veterans Bobby Garcia and Chari Arespacochaga. Featured in the cast are Aliw Award winner Rachel Alejandro, Felix Rivera, Aiza Seguerra, Frenchie Dy, Thea Tadiar and Joel Trinidad with Calvin Millado joining them for the first time.*

*Aiza, Frenchie and Calvin appear as live actors with Aiza taking on the pivotal role of Gary Coleman, the wonderkid from Different Strokes who now makes a living as an apartment superintendent. Aiza puts in the right amount of bitterness for being a has-been and optimism for brighter days ahead into Gary that every time she appears on stage, laughter ensues. Another standout character was Trekkie Monster (who's handled by Thea and Joel), a puppet who looks like he's the lovechild of Oscar the Grouch and The Animal but proves in the end that he's got a good heart.*

*On the other hand, both Rachel and Felix play dual roles on different ends of the pole (Rachel plays Kate Munster, the schoolteacher with a kind heart and the seductress Lucy Slut and Felix plays the idealist Princeton and the sexually confused Rod)—definitely no easy task—but their fluidity in jumping from one role to another is yet another reason to go out and see the show.*

*"The show is really hard to describe. I guess you can say it's like Sesame Street but it's about real life with adult humor. It's the funniest show you could ever see, I guarantee that your cheeks will hurt from all the smiling and laughing," Rachel shares with the*  
*Asian Journal*  
*via e-mail.*

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*Rachel's Lucy Slut earned one of the biggest laughs, actually, and her solo musical number will surely awe audiences. However, she says working with puppets isn't exactly as easy as we thought it to be.*

*"The biggest challenge was getting my hand and arm muscles strong enough to withstand the puppets and making them come to life," she says, adding that she did experience physical pain when they were starting out and when she got back to rehearsals after a two-year break from doing the show. Still, she insists it's all worth it since getting laughs from the audience is absolutely rewarding.*

*"I loved performing the show from the first night all the way to the last because of the reaction of the audience," she says. "People come up to me after the show ecstatic thanking me for a one-of-a-kind experience. I will never forget the glow in their faces. As a performer, I've never seen people as happy and as affected by my work in my 20-something years of being a singer/actress as I've seen while being Kate/Lucy in Avenue Q."*

*For sure, those who will see the show will leave the theatre happy and grinning from ear to ear.*

*Avenue Q runs from March 12-March 27 at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati City. For tickets, call Atlantis Productions at 892-7078 or 840-1187.*

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