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Going Out

Posted on 04:37 PM, March 11, 2010

BY SAM L. MARCELO, Reporter

Porno for puppets

THEATER
Avenue Q
 Presented by Atlantis Productions
 March 12 to 27
 Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium,
 RCBC Plaza, Makati

The Broadway spectacle *Wicked* had a gravity-defying green girl, flying monkeys, and a multi-million budget. On the night of the 58th Annual Tony Awards in 2004, none of these things could save it from being blindsided by *Avenue Q* and its puppet porn.

"It was a David and Goliath match that year, and David won," said Bobby Garcia, who is directing *Avenue Q*'s fifth run in the Philippines along with Chari Arespacochaga. Bagging the Tony award for Best Musical was so unexpected of *Avenue Q* that monitors inside New York's Radio City Music Hall mistakenly displayed "*Wicked*" as the winner for a few seconds.

In hindsight, Mr. Garcia believes that the X-rated crossover between *Sesame Street* and *Rent* won the Tony's top prizes because of its balls-to-the-wall uniqueness. "There's really nothing else like it," he said.

The modest production, with music and lyrics by Jeff Marx and Robert Lopez and a book by Jeff Whitty, is about Princeton, a wide-eyed college graduate who comes to New York armed with an idealism that offsets the fact that he's close to broke (he is an English major, after all).

He shacks up along *Avenue Q* and finds himself in the same neighborhood as a bunch of potty-mouthed monsters. Were it not for their tendencies to drop F-bombs or break into songs with titles like "The Internet is for Porn," "If You Were Gay" and "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist," the puppets of *Avenue Q* could probably have found a home on the sweet-aired sets of *Sesame Street*.

Those who grew up watching Ernie, Bert and the rest of gang will get a kick out of the musical since it spoofs -- and at the same time pays homage to -- the educational show. Where the latter teaches viewers how to count and cooperate, *Avenue Q* uses characters with names like Lucy the Slut to explore adult issues such as joblessness; homelessness; and sex, whether straight, gay, or puppet.

"The authors have said that they wrote it for people who don't normally enjoy musical theater," said Mr. Garcia of *Avenue Q*'s broad audience base. Although viewers attracted to the show's irreverence won't be disappointed, the larger message of finding purpose in life lies beneath all the political incorrectness. "*Avenue Q* has a big heart, which it wears on its sleeve," he said.

Atlantis Productions' restaging of *Avenue Q* features award-winning singer and actor Rachel Alejandro reprising her dual role of Kate Monster, a kindergarten teacher who falls for Princeton, and the aforementioned Lucy the Slut, a cabaret singer with cleavage.

Joining her are Felix Rivera, Aiza Seguerra, Frenchie Dy, Thea Tadiar, Joel Trinidad and -- for the first time -- Calvin Millado.

Mr. Garcia said that those who have seen these same actors in *Avenue Q* already know what kind of craziness they bring to the stage. However, the director added, the arrival of Mr. Millado lends a different flavor to this production.

To the uninitiated, he had only this to say: "Expect a *Wickedly* funny evening of musical theater with full puppet nudity."

For tickets, call Atlantis Productions at 892-7078 or 840-1187.



RACHEL ALEJANDRO and her alter egos Kate Monster and Lucy the Slut

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Weekend Guide

Paco Park Presents: Tagumpay Nating Lahat! March 5, 5 p.m. Paco Park, San Marcelino St., Manila.
Concert at the Park: Mula sa Prinsesa Sara, The Musical. March 7, 6 p.m. Rizal Park Open-Air Auditorium Rizal Park, Manila.
Si Juan Tamad, ang Diyablo at ang Limang Milyong Boto. Feb. 5 to March 7 at the PETA-Phinma Theater, Eymard Dr., New Manila, QC.
Ang Muntik Nang Di Mapiitlang Paghahari ni Arturo Ui. Feb. 17 to March 7. Wilfrido Ma. Gu

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