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ENTERTAINMENT

From Avenue Q to Bee

By Joel Trinidad Updated March 07, 2009 12:00 AM



MANILA, Philippines - I am standing in front of 2,000 strangers in a foreign land. My right hand is making flapping movements inside the mouth of a large, furry stuffed toy, while my left hand is making completely different gestures at the same time. Beside me is a woman, her left arm draped across my shoulders and her right hand mirroring my left in perfect time. I am singing, in a gruff, gravely voice that is not my own, about self-abuse and Internet pornography. My arms are cramping up and my throat is sore. I am hungry and I need a shower. And

I am having the time of my life.

An hour or so later, it was over, just like that. With the lyric "Everything in life is only for now," *Avenue Q* had ended. We had mounted the multi-awarded Broadway musical a total of 58 times in the span of almost two years — the most performances I, personally, have ever done of *any* show — and somehow, as we took our final bow in Singapore in November 2008, it still wasn't enough.

And really, it would *never* be enough. Perhaps because you put so much time and effort into it, you always get a little sad when a show ends — even the shows you didn't really enjoy all that much but agreed to do anyway: For the money, for your resumé, or to hang out with that cute girl you met at the audition. Even the ones in which you play an acrobatic chicken who does cartwheels to impress your leading lady, who happens to be a sheep. (Don't ask.) And *Avenue Q* was a show I absolutely *loved*. It was clever, edgy, original, and funny as hell. It had catchy songs and believable characters. It was even, masturbating monsters notwithstanding, pretty darn *wise*. And it had a cast made up of the most wonderful, talented people I've ever had to cite alphabetically: Rachel Alejandro, Teenee Chan, Frenchie Dy, Rycharde Everley, Carla Guevara-Laforteza, Felix Rivera, Aiza Seguerra, and Thea Tadiar, all of whom have become not merely respected colleagues, but true, lifelong friends. *Avenue Q*, with its friendships and challenges and triumphs and mishaps, and all the resultant anecdotes, was, quite simply, one of the most rewarding experiences not just of my career, but of my entire life.

And now it was over. The puppets were packed, the goodbyes said, the scripts set aside, the photos uploaded. Even in the unlikely event that the show were produced again some time in the future, featuring the same cast and crew, it would never be the same. Nothing ever is. The whole experience had, after all, only been "for now." It was time to move on to the next project.

And that turned out to be another award-winning Broadway musical, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. Like *Avenue Q* before it, *Spelling Bee* defies description. Any attempt to encapsulate the show invariably makes it sound, well, kind of dumb. "It's a show where grownups pretend to be 12-year old contestants at a spelling bee. Oh, with music. And dancing. And free candy. And, *erm*, audience volunteers who also have to spell words."

Hmmm. Now that I think about it, that actually sounds kind of fun.

And you know what? It is. *Spelling Bee* is entertaining and original, with clever songs, funny lines, lovable characters, and a story that goes all sorts of interesting and unexpected places. And there's one other thing that makes me excited to do the show, something that, while undoubtedly good news for all discriminating theatergoers, is even *more* exciting for me personally. Yes, I'm working with *Avenue Q* people! More than half of us are here: Felix (playing hotshot speller Chip Tolentino), Carla (as the shy Olive Ostrovsky), Ric (the socially inept William Barfee), Thea (child prodigy Marcy Park), and me (word pronouncer Douglas Panch). Even our *Q* directors, Bobby Garcia and Chari Arespacochaga, have returned to respectively direct and choreograph the new show. Joining us are some amazingly talented stage veterans: Cathy Azanza-Dy (Rona Lisa Peretti), Pheona Baranda (Logainne Schwartzandgrubenierre), Johann de la Fuente (Leaf Coneysbear), and Noel Rayos (Mitch Mahoney); all of whom I've known to some degree for years, and all of whom I can totally see myself bonding with offstage, *Avenue Q*-style.

In terms of life experience, *Bee* is never going to be *Q*. But then again, why should it? Right now,

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COLUMNS

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FUNFARE By Ricardo F. Lo

One down (disqualified)

and only 23 beauties are competing for three titles in the 2009 (45th) Bb. Pilipinas Pageant grand finals slated for tonight at the Big Dome — Bb. Pilipinas-Universe, Bb. Pilipinas-World and Bb. Pilipinas-International. Delayed telecast starts at 9:30 on GMA.

The intricacies of romance



STAR BYTES By Butch Francisco

I was never much of a Woody

Allen fan and was certainly not impressed with his works in the last decade or so.

'Mga kababayan ko, dapat lang malaman n'yo!'



FUNFARE Update By Ricardo F. Lo

The end came at 12 noon yesterday just as *Eat*,



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And really, I wouldn't have it any other way.

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee is presented in co-operation with **The Philippine STAR** and runs from March 20 to April 4 at the Carlos Palanca Auditorium, RCBC Plaza, Makati.

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

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