

Avenue Q

Performed by Young NOMADS

Kings Theatre Newmarket

Avenue Q is home to some lively and off the wall characters that are performed by an alliance of humans and puppets. In the adult version of the show characters and lyrics are somewhat raunchy at times, but this slightly sanitised version suited Young NOMADS a treat.

The story follows Princeton (Faye Dower), who comes to New York City with big dreams and a tiny bank account. He soon discovers that the only neighbourhood in his price range is Avenue Q; still, the neighbours seem nice. There's a kindergarten teaching assistant named Katie Monster (Olivia Savage), Nicky (Marcus Porter) the good-hearted slacker and his roommate Rod (Taylor Stephenson), an Internet addict called Trekkie Monster (Kiera O'Reilly & Ruby Massuard), a night club singer Lucy (Zara Minns), the boarding house Superintendent Gary Coleman (Abbie Good), Katie Monster's boss Ms Cockburn (Bella Lackovic) and two very cute Bad Idea Bears Elsie Hagger & Esme Latta). Then there's Brian the out-of-work comedian (Zac Wymer) and his Japanese therapist fiancée Christmas Eve (Zara Minns) the two "human" residents. Together, Princeton and his newfound friends struggle to find jobs, dates, and their ever-elusive purpose in life.

The set was colourful and imposing with fully functioning doors and windows which were all put to good use. Technically first-night gremlins made an appearance although they didn't appear to faze the puppets/actors, particularly Ms Cockburn who did both her little scenes in the dark. Normally I would mention the costumes but with this show I am never sure whether puppet costumes are wardrobe or props or, indeed, characters in their own right whose choice of clothing should be criticised? The actors became invisible in their black, as is the intention, and relied solely on their voices to bring life to the names we met. Conversely the Dance Team of Cheer Leaders, the Avenue Q Chorus and the "humans" in the cast all looked good.

A real feature of acting with another human is making eye contact and I wonder how hard it is, after learning to look into your co-actor's eyes, to focus instead on your puppet and watch it making 'eye contact' with its opposite number. I suspect it takes a lot of practice and it was convincingly achieved, in fact I found myself watching the puppet and not the puppeteer which is how it should be.

However much I liked the furry members of cast and their manipulators I should not ignore the human members who took on principal roles. Acting with puppets must be somewhat surreal and certainly allows you to play in a 'larger than life' way. Zara and Zac blended into the fun wonderfully well.

Performances from the Dance Team and the Avenue Q Chorus were all very good. Everyone was well focused throughout and more than held their own amongst all the fur.

There was much to commend in Director Andy Thorpe's production well supported by Choreographer, Jess Clifford. The Band under the baton of Musical Director Joseph Hall was first rate and the sound balance excellent.

Young NOMADS certainly "found their purpose" as they once again provided an excellent fun evening confirming there is a huge array of talent imbedded in this society.

Julie Petrucci
Regional Representative, NODA East.
District Four South.