

PLUCKY, PERVERSE PUPPETEERING

OCT Takes a Stroll Back Down Avenue Q

The bawdy, angst-filled puppets have returned. In the style of *Sesame Street*, but with a whole lot more sex, you can cringe in commiseration as Princeton, a recent college grad, searches for his Purpose. Like most 24-year-olds with delusions of significance he manages to lose a job, bungle relationships and spend his rent money on beer, but with a sincere and open heart. Princeton is accompanied by his mishmash of neighbors who fall into categories of adorable, closeted-gay, failed comedian and porn-addicted, all learning the lessons that would make Big Bird blush crimson right though his yellow feathers.

Yes, Oregon Contemporary Theatre is reviving its 2011 hit that was voted the *Eugene Weekly* Best Theater Production, the musical *Avenue Q*. I got in touch with Director Craig Willis and a few of his actors to hear about remounting a favorite production in a new space.

Back at the old Lord Leebrick Theatre, *Avenue Q* was a great success with an extended run. After the hard work of producing the show, which included creating its puppets, Willis says they “felt very gratified” by audience reactions, but “there were a lot of people we knew who didn’t get to engage with it last time ... in the back of our minds we thought we might remount it some time.”

The time has come. With a smooth transformation of the company from Lord Leebrick to Oregon Contemporary Theatre, and the opening of a new space, Willis eagerly

invited the cast to return to the story, including Trevor Eichorn as Princeton and Shannon Coltrane as Kate Monster.

“My first reaction to being invited back for the revival was literally, ‘Wait, I’m being asked to come back? Seriously?’ I’ve been incredibly honored to be asked to return as Nicky and Trekkie Monster again,” actor Colin Gray says.

While it is certainly less work to restage a production than to start from scratch, the cast and crew have a lot of work to do in the two and a half week rehearsal period. According to Gray, “It’s been a hell of a fun ride putting the show back together.” Willis notes that the muscle memory of the puppeteering seems to be stronger than the memory of the lines. Only four new cast members need to

learn those puppet skills: Tyler Andrew Jones, Tyler Ankenman, Evynne Hollens and David Mort.

“It’s funny how it gives you a different perspective, working on a show the second time around,” Willis says. Gray agrees, noting, “Overall, we’ve managed to mine the material in deeper aspects to achieve greater nuance, while still maintaining what has made the show so much fun to perform.”

“I think audience members who saw the show in 2011 will be pleased to see more nuanced performances by returning characters,” Eichorn says, “and delightfully different portrayals by the new actors; while audience members who didn’t see the show in 2011 ... They are in for a treat all ‘round.” ■

Avenue Q runs 7:30 pm May 3-18, at Oregon Contemporary Theatre, 194 W. Broadway; \$17-\$26.



SHANNON COLTRANE AS 'KATE MONSTER' AND TREVOR EICHORN AS 'PRINCETON'

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