Thursday November 15, 2018 by Scott Wiser

‘Avenue Q’ is the adult puppet show we need

All of us theater fans look for shows that remind us of why we fell in love with this art form.

There are few shows that touch our hearts, inspire our imaginations, display a unique perspective on this human experience, and give us that inexpressible giddy feeling in our stomachs. “Avenue Q,” the collaboration between Interior Independent Theatre and Theatre UAF, is W K H U D U H V K R Z W K D W the same time is incredibly complicated, this V D W L V I D F W R U \ P D G H \ R X U R Z Q W K L V F D V W G R H V Q ’ W wonderful production. “Avenue Q” is whimsical, satirical, biting, tasteful, F R Q V L G H U L Q J P D Q \ L D and so very charming. Yes, it is really that theater wants. It really is that good.

“Avenue Q” tells the story of puppet Princeton (Bill Torgerson) who has a B.A. in English, but no money and no practical skills. The only apartment he can afford is on Avenue Q. Along the way, he meets a collection of monsters, puppets and people who help him as he W U L H V W R ¿ Q G K L V S X U S R V H L Q O L I H ³ $ Y H Q X H Q Q ´ is the adult “Sesame Street” with some not-so-subtle references to it. It warps “Sesame Street” and pays homage to it, as well as providing adults with the same level of good (and terrible) advice as the beloved children’s series. Grover or Big Bird probably wouldn’t sing about encouraging a one night stand, but the puppets do here on Avenue Q, and you do leave the theater strangely with that same sense of childhood’s joy you had while watching “Sesame Street.”

The usage of puppets allows the show to delve into controversial topics with an innocence that makes the topics easier to discuss. The show is relatable to all of us who struggled through their 20s, listening to our own versions of the Bad Idea Bears (Amanda Torgerson and Kayla Gilchrist): quitting jobs, losing opportunities and falling for the wrong person.

At a fundamental level, this show provides strong lessons for what to expect during that time when you are thrown into the real world, way over your head, with no idea how to muddle through it all. We learn that all our dreams won’t come true and life really can suck, but we meet monsters and puppets to help us. In a delicious and lovely way, “Avenue Q” captures the humor and fun of this very complicated time of life.

The entire cast is impressive. The skill of acting, puppeting and singing all at W K L V F D V W G R H V Q ’ W V K R Z L W V H D V \ Q R E R G \ F R P H V R X W R I learned puppetry during rehearsals. Big Torgerson takes on two roles, Princeton and investment banker Rod, a spot-on impersonation of “Sesame Street’s” Bert, literally without missing a beat. David Martinson also plays two roles, perfectly channeling Ernie with his Nicky, and the lovably lewd Trekkie Monster, an adult Oscar the Grouch. Elsbeth Cheyne impresses with her endearing performance of Kate Monster. Kellie Bernstein’s voice is emphatically seductive as Lucy T. Slut, the puppet who challenges Princeton and Kate’s relationship.

Director Gwendolyn P. Brazier stages this production perfectly, directing a cast to such wonderful performances, all while they were learning new skills. Musical director Scott Hansen’s onstage band and the set designed by Adam Gillette provide the ideal accompaniment to this wonderful production. “Avenue Q” is whimsical, satirical, biting, tasteful, and so very charming. Yes, it is really that good.

“Avenue Q” runs at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in the Salisbury Theatre at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Tickets can be found R Q O L Q H D W Z Z Z X D I Avenue Q” should be considered rate R for language and adult themes. Patrons 17 years old and younger will not be admitted without a parent or guardian.

From left: Elsbeth Cheyne, Tana Fudge, Kellie Bernstein, David Martinson, Amanda Torgerson, William “Bill” Torgerson and Paul Adasiak. Kade Mendelowitz photo