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'Avenue Q' to come to the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center

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The national tour of the Tony Award-winning Broadway show "Avenue Q" will stop for an 8 p.m. show on Tuesday, Nov. 3, at the Albee Performing Arts Center as part of the Marshall Artists Series.

Courtesy of John Daughtry and www.avenueqontour.com
The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- Joshua Holden was the worst New York City waiter ever.

But boy does the Massachusetts actor play well with puppets.

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Fired twice as a waiter within a couple months, Holden was back living with his parents when the trained actor and puppeteer -- who had worked with puppets in London and Chicago -- got the call of a lifetime to join the cast of "Avenue Q," one of the coolest puppet shows on the planet.

Holden, who performed with the Chicago Children's Theatre and the Oily Cart in London, is one of a dozen actors/puppeteers criss-crossing the nation bringing alive the smash-hit Broadway musical "Avenue Q," which pulls into the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 3, as part of the Marshall Artists Series.



The national tour of the Tony Award-winning Broadway show "Avenue Q" will stop for an 8 p.m. show on Tuesday, Nov. 3, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center as part of the Marshall Artists Series. Pictured are Kami Brackin, Thelma Monster and Jason Heymann. Courtesy of John Daugherty and www.avenueqortour.com



The national tour of the Tony Award-winning Broadway show "Avenue Q" will stop for an 8 p.m. show on Tuesday, Nov. 3, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center as part of the Marshall Artists Series. Pictured are Kate Monster, Jacqueline Grabois, Princeton and Brent Michael Dillona. Courtesy of John Daugherty and www.avenueqortour.com



The national tour of the Tony Award-winning Broadway show "Avenue Q" will stop for an 8 p.m. show on Tuesday, Nov. 3, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center as part of the Marshall Artists Series. Pictured are Kate Monster and Jacqueline Grabois. Courtesy of John Daugherty and www.avenueqortour.com

Adult tickets are \$50, \$45 and \$40.

Because of some adult situations, like full-puppet nudity and some Simpsons-like humor, "Avenue Q" may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Called "The most fun on-stage this year," by the New Yorker when "Avenue Q" opened on Broadway in 2003, the three-time Tony Award-winning play uses actors on stage with the puppets to tell the musical story of Princeton, a poor college graduate with big dreams living in New York City and running into a menagerie of neighborhood characters such as Gary Coleman, the building's superintendent, Brian the out-of-work comedian and his therapist fiancée Christmas Eve and roommate Rod, a Republican investment banker who seems to have some sort of secret.

Written by the then-fledgling composer/lyricist team of Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx, "Avenue Q" has been tabbed as like "Sesame Street" for grownups with puppets singing straight-talking, sometimes politically incorrect songs such as "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist" and "The Internet's for Porn."

"It is such a brilliant meld of all the cultures we know and love," Holden said by phone while on tour. "It takes so much from what we've been brought up with, all of those children's television shows with puppets and humans living together like 'Sesame Street' and 'Mister Rogers.' So it takes all of those motifs that are dear to our hearts and brings you back to a wonderful place to talk about all the taboo subjects. So there's that element of pure shock, but it's a safe shock with a whole group of strangers going through this world with them. You can't believe they just said that or just did that, and then two minutes later you're totally affected about something really touching and real in this character. Yes, there's taboo subjects and shock, but it is 100 percent rooted into the heart."

Holden said only puppets could get away with the satirical songs such as "It Sucks to Be Me," which, like a mockumentary, pokes gentle fun at the preachiness of TV shows. There are even TV monitors above the stage flashing mock-educational vignettes.

"If the show didn't have puppets it wouldn't be so safe to talk about racism or safe to talk about modern subjects like online porn and make it really funny so that people relate to it," Holden said. "Imagine us singing it without the puppets and it's just kind of preachy, but this is almost like in this learning environment within the show."

Evidently audiences don't mind getting a little education with their entertainment.

Audiences across the country and world have connected deeply with the "Avenue Q" characters as they struggle to find dates and jobs and as they try to find what we're all looking for -- our purpose in life.

In fact, this tour of "Avenue Q" hasn't had a show where it hasn't gotten a standing ovation.

"It feels good because you are going to all of these different places and different cultures, and the show is just solid and the show works," Holden said. "They've been doing it for the past seven years, and this is the fourth incarnation of it with the Off Broadway, then Broadway, then the National Tour and then London. The creative team has learned how the machine works, and it works very well. All of the cultures get the same jokes, and the same reception is awesome. It's like you're going out on this amazing ride, and it happens, and we've yet to give a show that the audience did not give a standing ovation because it is such a unique experience."

Part of the unique experience is that the 50 puppets used in the show are operated on stage with the actors moving in unison, whether it is one actor using a rod puppet or one of the puppets that requires two actors to operate in unison.

The only actor in the show that was a trained puppeteer, Holden said the group got exhaustive training and puppet coaching with Amy Garcia, of the original production, before the show started.

"She was very meticulous in how to communicate emotions through these puppets," Holden said. "Ideally a puppeteer and a puppet are going through the same experience, and you have to be constantly asking 'How do I convey my emotional experiences through this puppet, and how do I channel as much as I can through my arm and through this little ball of fur with eyes?' When it comes to life, it is so magical and amazing."

While many shows tout themselves as "something different," Holden said "Avenue Q" really is that little entertainment oddball that wins over audiences. In fact, even his dad, a non-theater-going carpenter, "loved, loved" the show.

"With that Broadway series there's always 'Wicked' coming through or 'Beauty and the Beast,' but this really is something completely different," Holden said. "It's all that we know about a show, and then it has a certain kick to it. It's the same experience as watching a musical, but it takes it to the next level and that's completely unique. When is the last time you really connected with puppets? It is delightful -- that is the word that keeps coming up. It's like being a kid when you loved watching puppets and using your imagination, and now you're watching these puppets on stage and you see how they are manipulated and you see the puppeteer, and it's like you are now in on this little secret and you're watching how they are being created and brought to life on stage."

If you go: 'Avenue Q'

WHAT: The smash Broadway musical and adult-themed puppet comedy, "Avenue Q."

WHERE: The Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center, 4th Avenue, Huntington.

WHEN: At 8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 3.

HOW MUCH: Adult tickets are \$50, \$45 and \$40.

RATED PG-13: Note, due to adult situations (like full-puppet nudity), "Avenue Q" may be inappropriate for kids under 13. However, the show's Web site says it's great for teenagers because it's about real life addressing real issues like sex, drinking and surfing the Web for porn.

GET TICKETS: Call 304-696-6656 or Ticketmaster at 304-523-5757. In person at the Marshall Artists Series box office, located in the Joan C. Edwards Performing Arts Center, noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Tickets may also be purchased online at www.marshallartistsseries.org or www.ticketmaster.com.

WHAT THEY'VE SAID: "One of the funniest shows you're ever likely to see!" - Entertainment Weekly

AVENUE Q SHOW HISTORY: "Avenue Q" opened off-broadway at the Vineyard Theatre in March 2003 where it gained rave reviews and was extended four times. It won the 2003 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding New Musical and earned a nomination for the 2003 Outer Critics Circle Outstanding Off-Broadway Musical award. It began previews at the Golden Theatre on July 11, 2003 with a July 31, 2003 opening. "Avenue Q" played its final Broadway performance on Sept. 13, 2009. The show re-opened Off-Broadway at New World Stages this fall.

OTHER ARTISTS SERIES SHOWS: Just a couple of the upcoming Artists Series shows include: The Fall International Film Festival on Nov. 6-8, and "The Rat Pack is Back! - Here for the Holidays," at 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 30.

SPONSORS: Chapman Printing Company, American Babbitt Bearing, The Law Office of Doug Reynolds, and Prichard Electric. "Avenue Q" is also sponsored by, WKEE, WTCR, WOWK, The Herald Dispatch, Marshall University and The Marshall University College of Fine Arts.

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Keep it Clean. Please avoid obscene, vulgar, lewd, racist or sexually-oriented language.

PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR CAPS LOCK.

Don't Threaten. Threats of harming another person will not be tolerated.

Be Truthful. Don't knowingly lie about anyone or anything.

Be Nice. No racism, sexism or any sort of -ism that is degrading to another person.

Be Proactive. Use the 'Report' link on each comment to let us know of abusive posts.

Share with Us. We'd love to hear eyewitness accounts, the history behind an article.