

If you ever wondered how the TV show Friends might be if it had Fozzie Bear and Miss Piggy arguing about their one-night stand, but with more angst, expletives and full-on puppet sex - then go see Avenue Q.

The 2003 Tony Award winning musical came to Ottawa this summer and Aline's folks treated us to tickets as an anniversary present. The show is an autobiographical and biographical coming-of-age parable, addressing and satirizing the issues and anxieties associated with entering adulthood. Its characters lament that as children, they were assured by their parents, and by children's television programs such as PBS's Sesame Street, that they were "special" and "could do anything"; but as adults, they have discovered to their surprise and dismay that in the real world their options are not unlimited, and they are no more "special" than anyone else.

As young adults, the characters are searching for their purpose in life, and facing real-world adult problems with uncertain outcomes, as opposed to the simplistic problems and invariably happy resolutions faced by characters on children's television programming.

Much of the show's ironic humor arises from its contrasts with Sesame Street, a metaphor of the contrasts between childhood and adulthood: While the characters sing, dance, and interact with puppets in a light-hearted, Sesame Street-style atmosphere, they use abundant profanity in dialogue and musical lyrics; there are episodes of full puppet nudity (and puppet sex); and many songs and sub-plots address decidedly adult themes, such as racism, pornography, homosexuality, and schadenfreude.

The cast is composed largely of puppets, who interact with each other and with three human characters in a manner reminiscent of an extreme, X-rated version of Sesame Street. The set depicts a series of tenements along a rundown street in an outer borough of New York City. Short Sesame Street-style animated video clips are interspersed within the story.