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# 'Avenue Q' fun, but not for the whole family

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THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

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When Tim Kornblum auditioned for the latest national tour of "Avenue Q," his being cast was not exactly a safe bet.

"This was my first professional audition," Kornblum said in a recent telephone interview.

He was number 135 ("or something like that") out of hundreds of men, went through four callbacks over the next month and was — much to his surprise — cast in the show at the end of July.

"It was a completely unexpected kind of thing," Kornblum said. "It was one of those, 'Well, this would be a great show to be a part of, but let's just see what happens.'"

"Avenue Q" recently embarked on its first national tour of smaller cities, which brings the grown-up puppet musical to Springfield for the first time Saturday night at Sangamon Auditorium.

The story revolves around a group of characters — some human and some puppets — who live in what could be considered the dark alley behind "Sesame Street."

Kornblum plays Brian, an out-of-work comedian and one of the non-puppet cast members.

While he's acted in comedies before, he said none have been comparable to "Avenue Q."

"This is a very tough show to direct, I would imagine, because you have to direct it from a kid-show standpoint for adults, with that adult theme running through the entire show," Kornblum said.

"So there's always that balance between the adult humor and adult situations, and having to remember that you're learning everything while you're taking the journey on stage and that you're teaching it to the audience with them, instead of preaching it to them."

Kornblum grew up watching "Sesame Street," and he brushed up on Muppet programs throughout the rehearsal process, though he quickly added: "Of course we say that we have no relation to Jim Henson and the Muppet Company."

But there are clear similarities between "Avenue Q" and other unnamed felt puppets with which you may be familiar.

For example, one of the first songs, "What Do You Do With a B.A. in English?" sounds a lot like "The Rainbow Connection." And there's a line in the song "Life Outside Your Apartment" that's similar to "C is for Cookie."

"Avenue Q" characters also have obvious inspiration in those of "Sesame Street," such as Rod and Nicky (Bert and Ernie) and Trekkie Monster (Cookie Monster).

Rod is a seemingly gay (but thoroughly closeted) investment banker; his roommate Nicky sings, "If You Were Gay," in which he says he'd have no problem with his friend's apparent sexuality.

And Trekkie Monster trades his namesake's addiction to cookies for an addiction to Internet porn.

Kornblum, 21, said he had done a lot of acting in high school but decided to study psychology at Wagner College on Staten Island.

He was a semester away from graduating but made a deal with his parents that if he wound up on Broadway or a national tour, he could leave school early.

His parents thought it was a safe bet, one of those, "OK, sure, whatever you say" kind of things, Kornblum said. Alas, it's "Avenue Q" 1, Wagner College 0.

In preparing for the audition, Kornblum says he tried to cover his bases and be ready with as many characters as possible.

"I knew that I could do the voices of Nicky and Rod and Trekkie Monster, but I also knew that I looked like Brian, and dressed similarly to him," Kornblum said. "Not so clownishly, but there were definite similarities between our personalities and our physicality.

"So I went to the audition dressed in a Brian-esque kind of getup — not your typical audition attire. It was a colorful

**"Avenue Q"**

**When**  
8 p.m. Saturday

**Where**  
Sangamon Auditorium, on the campus of the University of Illinois Springfield

**Tickets**  
\$56/51/46, available at the Sangamon Auditorium ticket office, by calling 206-6160 or at [sangamonauditorium.org](http://sangamonauditorium.org).

**'N' is for No kids**

"Avenue Q" is full of adult humor unbound by propriety and political correctness, with songs such as "Everyone's a Little Bit Racist" and "The Internet is for Porn." (Listen below.)

There are also plenty of offensive stereotypes, such as the language of the Japanese therapist Christmas Eve, who speaks with an accent you might call "Engrish."

"It's not the place to bring your 6-year-old kid or 90-year-old, ultra-conservative grandmother," cast member Tim Kornblum said in an interview. "They will be shocked and they might drop dead."

Can you spell T-o-n-y?

green paisley button-down shirt and some plaid shorts and Converse sneakers, while everybody else was there in V-neck cardigan sweaters," Kornblum said.

Contrasting with his Brian looks, Kornblum chose to audition on a scene between puppets Rod and Nicky, doing the voices of both characters.

More actors were going for other roles than for Brian, and Kornblum eventually got the part.

Near the beginning of his first tour, which goes from coast to coast and Florida to Canada between now and June, Kornblum said life on the road is not nearly as bad as he expected it to be.

"I guess that's good, although as soon as I was cast I remember saying, 'Well, this'll be great, I'm basically being paid to go on vacation,'" Kornblum said. "And it wasn't quite that easy."

Traveling takes it toll, as does spending all day, every day with the same people. Then there's the work itself.

"Vocally it's a demanding show, because you have to place all these songs in a weird place in your body, because it's got that kids' show feel to it — it's not a normal-sounding show," Kornblum said.

He said Brian can be hard to tie into the rest of the show. He's an out-of-work, Jewish comedian engaged (and later married) to Christmas Eve, a Japanese therapist who speaks with a stereotypical "English" accent.

He interacts with every other character, but Brian is a very laid-back guy — sort of a Seth Rogen-type — "basically because he's stoned the entire time," Kornblum said.

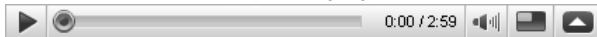
*Brian Mackey can be reached at 747-9587.*

#### Music samples:

**Everyone's a Little Bit Racist** (explicit language):



**The Internet is for Porn** (explicit language):



"Avenue Q" had a big year in 2004, winning Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score, beating "Wicked" in every category.

The show began off-Broadway, then ran for more than six years on Broadway, where it racked up [2,534 performances](#).

That makes "Avenue Q" the 20th-longest-running show of all time, though it's soon to face "Wicked" revenge. "Wicked," about the relationship between the good and bad witches in the "Wizard of Oz," is on pace to pass "Avenue Q" on the all-time Broadway list by the end of the month.

"Avenue Q" closed in September, but that night the producer surprised the New York theater world by [announcing from the stage](#) that the show would move to a smaller, cheaper off-Broadway theater. The show now runs at the 499-seat New World Stages.