

# Muppet Madness

## D'Abruzzo's Rule: Reality Begets Humor in 'Avenue Q'

by Iris Wiener

There's a lot to celebrate on *Avenue Q*. Now living it up in its third year on Broadway, the Tony Award winning musical is still the hottest ticket in New York. "Broadway was sort of the farthest thing from our minds," says Stephanie D'Abruzzo, an original cast member from the show's original 2003 Off-Broadway run. "We've survived because of

word of mouth. It was the people who came who told other people, or got their friends tickets for anniversaries, or dragged their friends when they came to town. Plus, we got really good reviews across the board, even when they were mixed they were really positive."

*Avenue Q* is the story of Princeton, a bright-eyed col-

"I had to fight early on for Kate's drink," says the actress, whose work with the characters earned her both a Drama Desk nomination and a 2004 Tony nomination. "Kate was initially conceived as being someone who was more insecure openly, who talked a lot about her weight. I thought that she wasn't a fat character, and it wasn't written by anyone who knows how women relate to weight issues. So I was fighting against making her pathetic." Kate comes off as anything but pathetic as she pulls at the heartstrings of her audience during such songs as "Mix Tape" and "There's a Fine, Fine Line."


"It's very easy for people to come to a show like this and think, 'Oh, they're puppets so they've got to be cute and funny,' but I go for real first. In anything, if you go for real first, funny follows," D'Abruzzo says. "Mix Tape," a song in which Kate deciphers the music on a cassette given to her by her crush, offers a perfect example of the harmony D'Abruzzo describes. "If you can't believe that those characters are real, then you're not going to believe in the show or the story."

Without realizing it, many people have heard how D'Abruzzo brings characters to life on another popular avenue...er, street. "There is no bigger thrill than having Big Bird say hi to you!" laughs the voice behind Curly Bear, Baby Bear's younger sister on public television's



lege graduate





New York City with big dreams and a tiny bank account. Together with his newfound friends (of both human and puppet nature), he struggles to find a job, a date, and every recent college graduate's dream—his purpose in life.

D'Abruzzo is the voice (and hand) behind the frustrated, single Kindergarten teaching assistant Kate Monster, and the lustful small-time singer Lucy T. Slut. "I think that I've brought more to Kate than to Lucy," she says. "Kate is a deeper more multi-dimensional character. I don't mean that in a bad way, but there's only so much you can bring to a one-dimensional character.

voices of Uma, Elizabeth, and Lulu on *Oobi*, a slew of inanimate objects on *Elmo's World*, and *Grizzly* in the feature film "Elmo in Grouchland."

"I've been a muppet performer since 1993, and I still do it whenever the work comes up," she says.

Two of the original *Avenue Q* cast members headed to Nevada to open the production of the musical at Wynn Las Vegas, but Broadway audiences can't get enough of D'Abruzzo. "It's more intense or daunting than anything else I've ever done, but I love it so much," she says of her long residence at the Golden Theatre.

*Avenue Q* is playing at the Golden Theatre, 252 West 45th Street. For ticket information visit [www.avenueq.com](http://www.avenueq.com).