

BWW Reviews: Puppets Plague the Future in THE PUPPET SHOPPE

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by Erin McIntyre



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Tony Award-winning shows like *THE LION KING*, *WAR HORSE*, and *AVENUE Q* have made extensive use of puppets on Broadway, but imaginative puppetry isn't limited to New York stages. *The Off Center for the Dramatic Arts* and *The Saints & Poets Production Company* present Chris Caswell's *THE PUPPET SHOPPE*, a two-person, many-puppet play directed by Jordan Gullikson.

Sitting in *The Off Center's* intimate black box theater before the show begins, audience members can take in the set. Large signs displaying rules like "No Eye Contact," "No Books," and

"No Metaphor Usage," hang in the periphery, while the focal point is the puppet shop, where puppets (many with their mouths taped shut) are stacked on shelves.

The play opens in a dystopian world of censorship and tyranny, not too far in the future. The government has taken control of the flow of information, and all non-government sources of knowledge have been banned. No internet. No story-telling or public performing. Worst of all, no books.

Puppet shop owners Boris (G. Richard Ames) and Anya (Chris Caswell) are plunged into turmoil when they find themselves in possession of the last existing book. Drama, intrigue, and betrayal ensue in a riveting hour of theater that plays like a brilliant mash up of Hitler Germany, Orwell's 1984, *URINETOWN*, and *AVENUE Q*.

Ames and Caswell play the only two human roles, while also operating a multitude of puppet characters. The government is made up of evil (and often hilarious) puppets, who keep Boris and Anya in a constant state of fear. Ames and Caswell's ability to maintain their terrified human roles while simultaneously operating the tyrannical government puppets is extraordinary, particularly in a fight scene where the two humans are captured by government officials. Recommended for ages 14 and up, *THE PUPPET SHOPPE* is a fast-paced ride with plenty of comedy along the way.

THE PUPPET SHOPPE plays at *The Off Center for the Dramatic Arts* in Burlington, VT through September 22, 2013. Visit www.offcentervt.com for dates, times, and more information.

Photo: Caswell and Ames with two of their puppet co-stars

Photo courtesy of *Saints & Poets Production Company*