



String a different tune: Gay puppet musical comes to Park Slope

By Caroline Spivack
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Photo by Jason Speakman

Puppet master: Tim Young, right, holds two of the stars of his puppet musical “Anthropomorphic,” playing in Park Slope on June 27.

This ain’t your kids’ puppet show.

A musical puppet performance that follows the metaphysical journey of a suicidal gay teenager will belt out its tunes at the Park Slope gay bar Excelsior on July 27. And though “Anthropomorphic” dives into an occult world of human-insect hybrids, it is a deeply personal show rooted in first-hand experience, said its creator.

“It tells my struggles and my stories as a kid growing up in a conservative family in South Carolina,” said Timothy Young, of Park Slope’s Puppetry Arts. “I was on the brink of suicide, but I was able to confront my demons — so I took my story a step further. One thing I learned from that is that I am someone to be loved. Everyone is someone to be loved, and I hope that message comes across in the show.”

The performance uses Japanese-style bunraku puppetry and shadow puppets to tell the story of Wesley, a bullied gay teen who is driven to suicide. The show largely takes place in an otherworldly, Purgatory-like space, where Wesley embarks on a journey of self-discovery, encountering a curious cast of characters including singing scorpions, spiders, and crickets. Despite the unusual trappings, at its core is a relatable story about conviction and family, said Young.

“This is a story about faith. A story about the love between a mother and a son and her hard-line Christian values that are wrongly used to judge someone,” said the Park Slope puppeteer. “His only escape is taking his life, so in the purgatory of his mind is where the story takes place.”

The provocative puppet show also includes odes to a variety of religious texts and historical eras in order to celebrate diversity, he said.

“I incorporate women’s right, gay rights. I infused the Koran, the Torah in dialogue and songs,” said Young. “It is a strong American story.”

Young has performed the show once a year for almost a decade, changing and adapting it with each performance, he said.

For those familiar with Puppetry Arts — and its signature character, fuzzy feline character [Tuffy Tiger](#) — the mature content of “Anthropomorphic” might come as a shock, but the show is perfectly in line with the group’s mission to share the art of puppetry with the masses — including toddlers, teens, or over-21 bar patrons, said Young.

“It’s a departure from what many parents are aware of, but it’s not a departure from our mission. ‘Anthropomorphic’ is for our other audience that we don’t want to neglect,” said Young.

“Anthropomorphic” at the Excelsior Bar (563 Fifth Ave. between 15th and 16th Streets, www.puppetryarts.org/anthropomorphic). July 27 at 8 pm. Free.

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