

PREVIEW

HAVE BOX WILL TRAVEL
LYRIC STUDIO

CHARLIE Dark – haven't heard of him? Not to worry, by the end of this show you'll know him better than his biggest fans.

Those familiar will know him as a DJ, producer and spoken-verse poet, famous for recording on James Lavelle's *Mo Wax* record label in the late 90s and for launching the ongoing *Blacktronica* club night in 2001.

Thankfully however, this 90-minute one-hander is not a celebrity-DJ tribute. More tears and trials than babes and bling, *Have Box Will Travel* is the story of a displaced Ghanaian boy finding his identity through dance, music and downfall.

"One minute you're playing to thousands in a club, the next you're alone in a hotel room. The loneliness is hard to deal with," Charlie says of his jet-set DJ days.

"The worst thing is you can't tell anyone. You're supposedly living the dream, yet the dream is far from what you thought it would be."

Charlie's dream officially fell apart eight

BEHIND THE DECKS

CHRISTIAN MCLAUGHLIN TALKS TO DJ, POET AND NOW PLAYWRIGHT CHARLIE DARK ABOUT HIS PLAY AND THE DOWNSIDE OF LIVING THE DJ DREAM

years ago after being dropped by Sony at the peak of his career.

"Big music labels make a lot of demands, and I hope this play can explain a bit more about the pressure you come under," he says.

A spoken-verse poet for more than 15 years, this is Charlie's first attempt at full-length theatre.

"My poems are usually a couple of minutes long,

so I just treated the play as a very long poem."

A poem broken up by the very best of his music collection, pumped out from an impressive array of turntables and music production equipment scattered across the Lyric Studio stage.

Having battled back to launch *Blacktronica*, as well as being a proud father of two, Charlie once

again feels like the master of his own destiny.

"Growing up is a lot more difficult than I'd imagined. I'm just glad I've got to the stage where I can get up in front of an audience and tell the highs and lows of my story."

● *Have Box Will Travel* by Charlie Dark is at the Lyric Studio, Lyric Square, Hammersmith, until May 3. Shows at 8pm Monday-Saturday. £12/9 concs. Call 08700 500 511. See www.lyric.co.uk



VINYL LIFE: Charlie Dark's play deals with life as a DJ

A FUNNY FEAST

PREVIEWS

SCI-FI FILM FESTIVAL,
COMEDY AT THE LYRIC

■ SCI-FI films not your bag? Think again. That's what Louis Savy said to his friend Suzanne seven years ago. She was working in PR, and he was in need of a challenge.

"You do the PR and I'll put together a sci-fi film festival," he said. Seven years later, the five-day festival draws crowds of thousands; the two are married and share their success with Lily and Saskia, their two young daughters.

"It's a true geek's fairytale," says festival director Louis. But beside the romance, the breadth of the festival is the key. Delightful art-house films such as Argentina's *La Antena* (pictured) and Japan's *Dai Niponjin* mix with children's screenings of *The Wizard of Oz* and back-to-back all-nighters for adults.

Geek or not, don't miss out.
● Sci-Fi-London, April 30-May 4, Apollo West End, 19 Regent Street, SW1. See www.sci-fi-london.com

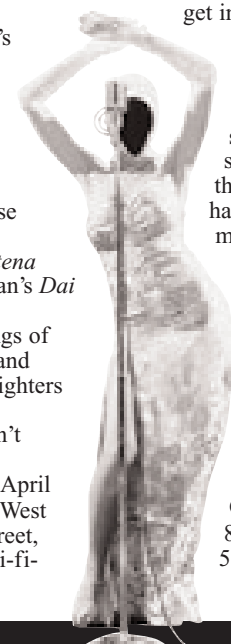


■ LIFE is a skit for Shepherd's Bush resident Richard Herring (above). On the final day of his last comedy tour he managed to get in a punch-up.

"I remember thinking how rubbish we both were at fighting. Our arms were flailing, eyes squinted," he says. "I just can't resist seeing the funny side of things, and even as it was happening I thought 'this will make good material for a skit!'" Richard, who thrives off the improvised element of comedy, is the host of the Lyric Theatre's excellent comedy series.

Guests this Sunday include Irish stalwart Sean Hughes and soon-to-be huge Holly Walsh and Pappy's Fun Club.
● Lyric Hammersmith, W6. 8pm. £15/10. Call 08700 500 511. See www.lyric.co.uk

Christian McLaughlin



STREET-SMART PUPPETS PLAY

REVIEW

AVENUE Q,
NOEL COWARD THEATRE

IMAGINE a world where the characters from *Sesame Street* have grown up and it's all gone a bit wrong – Cookie Monster is a porn addict and Bert's in love with Ernie... If you can instantly visualise what that would be like, either you need to seek professional help or you've seen *Avenue Q*.

The *Avenue Q* monsters have been shouting at Londoners from tube station escalators since 2006, but it's one of those plays that has still escaped many theatre-goers and, really, probably won't appeal to your average thespian or musical lover.

Aimed more at the *South Park* generation, this tale of creature discomfort is set in a poor housing block in New York, Avenue A is the nice area and, well, by the time you get to Q the standard has dropped.

It follows the story of Princeton, a man in his early 20s looking for his purpose in life after getting his degree in English. Having lost his first job before even starting his first day, he gets led astray by the Bad Idea Bears – two Care Bear-alikes offering helpful suggestions like "buy beer" and "why not hang yourself" in a horribly cheery tone.

It's not all bad for the young graduate, he falls in and out of love with Kate Monster and is also accosted by the local cabaret singer/tart.

All of the characters on the street have their own problems, one is gay and in love with his straight flatmate,



one has a powerful compulsion to look at adult material on the internet and another is getting married to a harsh, controlling therapist.

However, none are more tragic than their landlord/caretaker, Gary Coleman who seems to have been picked on by the writers somewhat unnecessarily. Gary, is based on the child star of US sitcom *Different Strokes*. There are several gags at the star's expense, if the audience is in any doubt of who he is meant to be, these are immediately dispelled by his opening speech: "Try having people stopping you to ask you 'What' cha talkin' 'bout, Willis?' It gets old".

Despite having nothing to do with the Jim Henson workshop, the puppets do have a very *Sesame Street* or *Muppet* quality – they look amazing with several puppets per character all given different expressions and used as required.

However, unlike the adventures of their small screen counterparts, you can see their puppeteers. This is initially quite off-putting and you never stop noticing them. However, the acting and voices are so good, they only add to their character's value. The production looks even

stranger with the addition of several of human characters. Undoubtedly, *Avenue Q*'s biggest strength lies in the fabulously crude songwriting, ditties such as: *The Internet Is For Porn*, and *You Can Be As Loud As The Hell You Want (When You're Makin' Love)* are horribly catchy and it's worrying when you find yourself belting out "Why you think the net was born? Porn, porn, porn" on the tube home.

Despite the cute-looking puppets, it's not one for the kids, there's even a puppet sex scene to endure and if easily offended then it's probably better to stick to more mainstream musicals.

If you like to be disgusted, are looking for your purpose in life or spend too much time surfing for 'entertainment' on the web then you may just identify with one or two of the characters.

● *Avenue Q* is on at the Noel Coward Theatre, St Martin's Lane, WC2N, Monday-Saturday (two performances Friday and Saturday).

Tickets range from £10-50 and are available in person from the box office, by calling 08444 825 141 or via www.avenueqthemusical.co.uk

Chris Donkin