



### **Centaur Theatre presents – Little Willy is a laugh riot ... with strings attached!**

Canadian puppeteer Ronnie Burkett returns to the Centaur Theatre for the third time with his wild take on William Shakespeare called Little Willy and the results are hilarious. In fact, serious students of the Bard will end up blushing while they're laughing at the same time!

The premise has the Daisy Theatre being visited by Shakespeare himself to urge its harried manager to stage one of his plays, in particular, Romeo and Juliet. Once that's decided, he is visited by many of the theatre's cast of popular characters, including Esme Massengill, the diva of divas (who demands loud, raucous ovations every time she makes her grand entrance onstage); Edna Rural, the widowed cookbook author from Alberta who offers homespun tales from her life; and Schnitzel, the innocent, wide-eyed faerie whose unique take on life always warms the hearts of his audience. Each character's appearance has a common goal: to land one of the coveted lead roles as the ill-fated young lovers from Verona.

Watching the premise of Little Willy unfold in front of me was reminiscent of something similar that was usually presented on The Jack Benny Program. For those who are familiar with old school comedians and classic TV comedy, or those from younger generations who are not, The Jack Benny Program ran on radio from 1932-1955 and on television from 1950-1965. It started with comedian (and star) Jack Benny appearing onstage in front of a studio audience with a curtain behind him, as he explained the situation that will take place on that week's show. That's when he gets constantly interrupted by members of his cast of regulars or that week's celebrity guest. However, by the time the 30 minutes were up, the situation in question took place, much to Jack's satisfaction and the amusement of the audience.

Thanks to Mr. Burnett's energetic, breathless talent to coordinate a company of over 60 crafted marionettes and do a variety of different character voices simultaneously for a two-hour show is something to behold. Done with music, lighting effects, inside jokes, snappy dialogue and plenty of ribald one-liners, Burkett knows how to keep his audience constantly entertained without a second to catch your breath (especially the audience participation segment that acted out the death scene that ends Romeo and Juliet).

Thanks to the dynamic duo of Ronnie Burkett and his Daisy Theatre, the world of William Shakespeare and his extraordinary body of literary works will never be looked at in the same light again. Hopefully, Burkett and his all-string company of way-out characters can be a semi-regular part of Centaur's theatrical repertoire, like a Vegas residency without all the flashy lights and legal gambling.

By: Stuart Nulman – [info@mtltimes.ca](mailto:info@mtltimes.ca)