



*Little Willy* is Canadian puppeteer Ronnie Burkett's first new production in more than three years. The title is a reference to William Shakespeare, but those who are familiar with Burkett's Daisy Theatre shows know not to expect much to do with the Bard of Stratford. *Little Willy* turns out to be an autoschediastic adaptation on the Bard's classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

With some clever string-pulling by Burkett, burlesque queen Dolly Wiggler gets the show off to a raucous start performing an Elizabethan style striptease. Dolly's dance certainly sets the tone, letting the audience know, in case there was any doubt, that they're in for an adult puppet show.

Daisy Theatre regulars Dolly Wiggler and the spidery-legged veteran vaudevillian Esmé Massengill vie for lead role of Juliet. Yet, despite their contentious claims, it's the androgynous Schnitzel, decked in a pink and blue outfit, who, with the Bard's approval gets the role of both Juliet and Romeo for the balcony scene.

Like many of Burkett's shows, *Little Willy* relies on some audience participation for its success. The audience for this opening performance certainly responded by bonding with the puppets. A few audience members even committed to assisting with the show in Rosemary Focaccia's foul-mouthed song and dance routine.

The humour is very broad. Burkett himself is mostly invisible, "hiding" behind the various personalities of his marionettes – after all, who would be offended by what comes out of the mouth of a fifty-centimetre high doll? As one might expect from an *ad hoc* show, it's not particularly well paced with some segments being disproportionately staged. For instance, Edna Rural, a widow from rural Alberta serves up a folksy conversation about nothing in particular.

Over the years, Ronnie Burkett has become a Cultch favourite. Much like his *de facto* mascot Schnitzel who returns to the stage at the end of the show, he calls upon his audience to find beauty in the face and form of the ordinary.

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