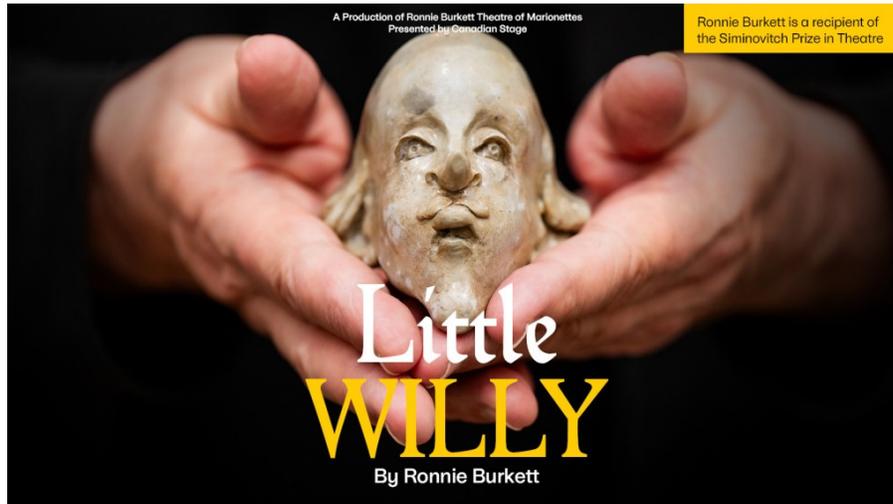


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front mezz junkies

a theatre review blog

Missing the Opening of “Little Willy” at Canadian Stage



Frontmezzjunkies reports: *Little Willy* Opens at Canadian Stage

There's something a little bittersweet about an opening night you already know you'll miss, especially when it belongs to an artist whose work has a way of lingering long after the puppets are hung on their hooks with care. This month, Toronto's **Canadian Stage** welcomes back the singular puppeteer Ronnie Burkett to the **Berkeley Street Theatre** with *Little Willy*, an irreverent **Daisy Theatre** riff on *Romeo and Juliet*, opening February 27. Equal parts mischievous cabaret and handmade theatrical magic, Burkett's shows have long carried the promise that anything, and anyone, might spring to life before your eyes.

Ever so sadly, I won't be there on opening night, but don't feel too bad for me. I'll be catching the show in early March, while still noting the lingering high of seeing his *Wonderful Joe* last November at the **Grand Theatre** in London, Ontario. It was a production that felt like a gentle and engaging conversation with the soul of a city through the eyes of the gentlest of Joes. It's a work that revealed itself most beautifully as "*a love letter to the overlooked*," filled with humour, resilience, and unexpected grace. The production isn't just about change or loss; "*it's about the stubborn persistence of joy, about seeing beauty where others refuse to look, and living in optimism and connection.*" On that puppet stage, Burkett built an entire universe from wood, string, and compassion, introducing audiences to a tender-hearted dreamer whose alleyway world shimmered with possibility. What lingered most wasn't just the astonishing craft, but the kindness at its center, a reminder that Burkett's theatre asks us to slow down, lean closer, and truly see the people we might otherwise pass by.

If past experience is any indication, *Little Willy* won't simply parody or poke at Shakespeare. It will likely bend comedy and poignancy together in that uniquely Burkett way: bawdy, heartfelt, and a little bit miraculous. Opening nights come and go, but with artists like this, anticipation becomes part of the pleasure. Sometimes the joy is knowing the magic is already underway, waiting patiently for when you can finally step into the room and embrace its gentle beauty, knowing also that it will linger in our hearts long after.