

## **Little Willy – Review of 2026 Ronnie Burkett Puppet Show at Berkeley Street Theatre**

Culture and Arts

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March 5, 2026

**Little Willy** is a puppet show that springs from the fertile imagination of Ronnie Burkett and is performed by him handling the marionettes, several volunteers on stage and the audience.

The numerous puppets that he manipulates and provides the voices for are clever, entertaining, occasionally foul-mouthed and very funny. Little Willy is Shakespeare and the puppets are staging **Rome and Juliet**, as you may have guessed, irreverently and hilariously. There are other skits in between that are not always completely comprehensible but the opening night audience seemed to know what was happening before it even happened and proved one of the most enthusiastic audiences, louder even by opening night standards.

There are numerous characters like Esmé Massingell, Rosemary Focaccia, Major-General Lesley Fuckwad, Jolie Jolie; Miss Lillian Lunkhead, Mrs. Edna Rural, Schnitzel, Dolly Wiggler and volunteers picked from the audience with hilarious results. The “characters” have various personalities and tell some wonderful stories, both humorous and sad. The show Burkett tells us is unscripted and he had to adlib many sequences. In fact on several occasions, he had to ask his prompter Cystal to tell him where he was.

The focus of the show, as much as there is a focus in this free-wheeling production, is a performance of Romeo and Juliet. The title **Little Willy** is a clue if you need one.

We get some introductory remarks about the feuding families and the star-crossed lovers. It will all lead to a hilarious rendition of the death scene of Juliet but a lot more will happen before that happens. Who will play Juliet? How about the diva Eme? Or perhaps the slightly elderly Miss Lillian? Then there is Edna from Alberta who describes movingly her life and the wonderful fairy Schnitzel. There are other characters as well that display Burkett’s mastery as puppeteer and writer of raunchy scenes and touching segments. We meet a motley group of characters with stories to tell an audience whose enthusiasm seemed boundless. Willy appears, too, of course.

Burkett is an expert at using audience members to produce laughter. A young woman is called on stage and she is shown how to produce the “orchestra” out of a box and conduct it by turning a knob. She is hilarious. Two young men are recruited, one an actor, and they remove some clothes and again Burkett uses them to get gales of laughter.

The last volunteer is also an actor and he is called to volunteer to play Romeo with a puppet Juliet in the final scene of Shakespeare's play. He strips his upper body of clothes and lies down, dead. He needs the vessel from which he drank the poison. He does not have one and Burkett provided him with one by lowering it to him from above. He needs a dagger for Juliet to stab herself with. He is provided with one from above. Resounding laughter.

The scene rises to screaming hilarity when Romeo put the dagger on his crotch and Juliet keeps reaching for it. She asks him to keep the dagger up so she can fall on it and kill herself. She keeps reaching for "the dagger" and brings the house down with howls of laughter Just another brilliant stroke by Burkett. And did I mention the dancing sausages?

There are many people working behind the scenes. John Alcorn gets credit for music, sound design and lyrics. Kim Crossley gets credit for costume design. But **Little Willy** is the brainchild of the imagination, mental and physical dexterity, writing and, in a word, genius of Ronnie Burkett.