

operaramblings

John's opera ramblings

Posted on [February 28, 2026](#)

Little Willy is a hilarious, filthy, Shakespearean (maybe) romp

Ronnie Burkett's show *Little Willy* opened at CanStage Berkeley Street on Friday night. It's a puppet show like you have probably never seen before. It's clever, it's filthy and it's very funny. Burkett is creator, puppeteer, actor and singer all rolled into one. The plot concerns a second rate, but very Canadian, theatre company attempting to stage a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. What ensues is frankly rather hard to describe.



There's the Daisy Theatre; a classic puppet stage where the puppets are at stage level and Ronnie above them; speaking, singing and puppeting (all the characters, all the voices, almost). The characters range from Will Shakespeare to a couple of has been actresses, a frazzled theatre manager, a past her sell by date Las Vegas chanteuse, a cross-dressing general, William Shakespeare and a fairy. Scenes unfold (unravel?) with a tenuous connection to the Shakespeare play. There's a balcony scene and the scene in the tomb at the end but the Capulets party scene goes badly awry when the general tries to play Capulet.



The actress who only plays witches and so on keeps trying to get in on the act provoking repeated cries of "Fuck off Debby" from the audience. The faded chanteuse somehow gets involved and demands male back up dancers for her act. Ronnie conscripts two young men from the audience to act as shirtless puppeteers for her back up crew who are actually penis puppets. Another young man is conscripted to be the dead (shirtless) Romeo on whom, or rather on whose groin, the suicidal Juliet (played by a puppet actress of rather advanced years) repeatedly throws herself. And much more...



All this is facilitated by Music, Lyrics and Lighting by John Alcorn, a more than usually visible role by stage manager Crystal Salverda and the good-natured participation of the lost souls conscripted from the audience.



It's part *Slings and Arrows*, part *Spitting Image* (one of the puppets looks exactly like the SI Prince Charles), a soupçon of Shakespeare and some filthy but very funny sight gags. An hour and three quarters flies by. It's a must see but maybe don't take your maiden aunt and maybe don't sit too near the front unless you look really good shirtless.