Review: The Daisy Theatre
Baryshnikov Arts Center
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In *The Daisy Theatre*, Ronnie Burkett reinvents the one-man show -- with the help of about 40 marionettes. This production of the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes at the Baryshnikov Arts Center is a variety show where all of the usual larger-than-life performers -- burlesque dancers, old divas, old queens, ventriloquists -- are controlled from above via wire and strings.

The Daisy Theatre differs from Burkett's other work, which spans 30 years, in that it isn't a single story. Burkett cleverly uses the format of a variety in order to introduce us to a number of vivid personages who are all there to reveal something about themselves and entertain us -- and they are dying to entertain us. They range from the odd character of Schnitzel, a troll-like girl who wants to become a fairy and get her wings, to an old British major who treats the stage and other performers as part of his command unit before doing a wonderful cabaret number in a pink glitzy gown, to an aged Canadian theatre diva who treats us to her infamous portrayal of Juliet. Burkett is wickedly funny, provocative, totally politically incorrect, and has moments of sincere and endearing sentimentality.

The other unique premise of *The Daisy Theatre* is that Burkett engages with the audience, often through improvised dialogues and monologues delivered by his stars, and then by interacting with the audience as Ronnie Burkett; the marionettes break the pseudo-fourth wall by interacting with their creator and puppet master, too. Burkett asks us to decide which character to bring out next, and calls on for help from audience members to play leading and supporting roles on stage, alongside the charming, demanding, and talented performers. But of course, all the talent rests with Burkett who mixes dozens of accents and voices, and performs well-timed physical maneuvers to make us forget about the wires that control the marionettes' limbs and bring these characters to life.