

# Theatre review: Ronnie Burkett's puppets shock and delight

BY MARK LEIREN-YOUNG, SPECIAL TO THE SUN NOVEMBER 28, 2013



The chanteuse Jolie Jolie with the band, in *The Daisy Theatre*, by the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes.

## The Daisy Theatre

To Dec. 15 | The Cultch

Tickets: \$33 at [tickets.thecultch.com](http://tickets.thecultch.com)

The couple in the seats next to me kept muttering, "Oh, my God." Then a woman a few rows back gasped out the same words. Some audience members blurted out the phrase, some whispered it, but everyone was thinking it. "Oh, my God, he can't really be... Oh, my God, he is."

Ronnie Burkett's work never fails to shock. It also never fails to amaze and delight.

Burkett is a master of marionettes. On opening night his show kicked off with a puppet burlesque that was so technically dazzling it was worth several "Oh, my Gods," even without the sparkling dialogue.

But that's Burkett's real gift. His art may be his puppetry but it's the content that makes Burkett's work its own genre.

After promising the audience in his pre-show introduction that his cabaret style puppet show wasn't really about much, Burkett explored heaven, hell, love, lust, death, aging, mourning and the search for

God.

But by Burkett's standards this was fairly light fare — no crucifixions, holocausts or concentration camps like in past shows.

The Daisy Theatre — inspired by cold war puppet shows in Czechoslovakia — is also topical, local, rude, crude and up to the minute. Burkett's puppets weren't just cracking obligatory jokes about Rob Ford and tossing in a few Surrey asides, but making digs about the renovations at the York Theatre and the Arts Club production of Mary Poppins.

The Alberta artist, who's a regular guest artist at the The Cultch, not only knows the Vancouver scene intimately he knows exactly who fills the seats on opening night so he was quipping about comp tickets, the Jessie Awards, local media outlets and The Cultch.

Burkett's verbal pyrotechnics are especially impressive because not only is he adjusting his show every night, working with new material for each performance and choosing which puppets he wants to play with a few hours before showtime, but he delivers his material with a rapid-fire delivery.

Sometimes it's more fun to focus on Burkett manipulating his charges and rattling off their lines in their voices than watch the puppets perform their songs and sketches.

The cast of puppets on opening night included Murray, an aspiring devil who took out the soul trade franchise in Vancouver and the burbs (except for the Hell that is Surrey); a fairy determined to get her wings; an aging French chanteuse; a cross-dressing British general; a rural Alberta widow in her Sears dress; a cow; and the opera's fat lady, who never did get to sing.

Despite the shock value when Burkett made a crack about his show not being Avenue Q — the risqué Muppet-style smash that recently slayed on Granville Island— he wasn't just talking about the difference in puppet stylings. The Daisy Theatre is raunchy, rude and risqué but it's also unequivocally a work of art.

Burkett's mastery of his craft and the beauty of his handmade puppets makes the comedy funnier, the raunch raunchier and keeps the heartfelt and heartwarming moments, genuinely sweet and moving.

After the curtain closed on his puppet stage Burkett, who was rocking a Movember moustache, cut off the standing ovation to invite people to pose with their favourite puppet for \$20 to raise money for Movember men's health programs, so if you're catching the show before the end of the month bring your camera.