

10 Days on Earth runs at the Martha Cohen Theatre until Oct. 8  
Play tugs at heartstrings  
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It's hard to believe a puppet show could bring you to tears.

RONNIE BURKETT

But that's exactly what marionettes master Ronnie Burkett has accomplished in his new emotional offering 10 Days on Earth, playing at Alberta Theatre Projects until Oct. 8.

It tells the story of Darrell, a mentally-handicapped man who has the maturity of a boy.

His mother, Ivy, has died in her bed, but Darrell, who has been told to never enter his mother's bedroom when the door is closed, doesn't understand why she is ignoring him.

At first, he simply goes on with his set-in-stone weekly routine not aware that anything is wrong. But that begins to slowly change as he arrives home after "job" each day to find dinner, like lunch, will, once again, be missed.

In order to cope with his loneliness and hunger, Darrell daydreams about the characters in favourite children's book — Honeydog and Little Burp, who are in search of a new home.

While this play-within-the-play is cute, it seems far to simple and childish to be included in such an emotional and sometimes crude story.

This not because it doesn't fit well with Darrell's predicament, but because it is not stimulating enough for the adult audience Earth is targeting towards.

It's difficult to go from watching loveable animals making friends as they saunter through the forest to witnessing a homeless man-come-prophet, Lloyd, scream and curse (every second word), without feeling a tad confused and uneasy.

But, that is a just small hiccup in an otherwise very charming, witty and highly amusing tale of innocence and its loss.

And as for the man himself, Burkett continues to amaze with his ability to stage a complex show.

Not only did he write 10 Days on Earth, design the set and sculpt the puppets, he sings, speaks and physically manipulates more than a dozen characters during this two-hour play.

And when mistakes happen, which they inevitably will, Burkett remains calm, simply working the error (in this case, a puppet's head twisted backwards) into the script, which resulted in one of the most magical moments on opening night.

Sun rating (out of 5 stars)