

10 Days on Earth | Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes



Written by Aleksei Wechter

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The moment *Darrel's* mother, *Ivy*, steps on stage the magic begins. Her frail frame cautiously steps across the stage, then back, pausing for a moment at the threshold of her bedroom door to reflect on her life before stepping inside and closing the door to be alone; to die.

Darrel is a simple, middle-aged, man; in a Forrest Gumpish sense. When his mother does not re-emerge from her room he continues his daily routines as best he can and continues to talk to her through the bedroom door. What ensues is a montage of episodes from *Darrel's* life, his past and the story of his alter-ego the *Honey Dog* (a gentleman pooch in a cranberry jacket who wanders through the woods assisting the strangers he meets along the way).

This is of course **Ronnie Burkett's Theatre of Marionettes**, but there were times when I forgot that I was watching puppets only to be brought back to reality when the marionettes dashed across the stage a little faster than their animated legs could manage or exited the stage and floated up to their hanging position awaiting their next cue and **Burkett's** embrace. **Burkett** is undoubtedly a master of guiding his cast through all matter of human (and otherwise) gesture, but the real magic is his ability to convey characters across his player puppets.

Walking away from the show I felt like I had known *Darrel*, I definitely could empathise with his plight; not wanting to be alone, for things to remain as they are, or as his scruffy counterpart *Honey Dog* would say 'simply simply'. Every character in the production is a round, whole person or animal as the case may be. I guess you would expect that from any theatrical production, but you have to remember that **Burkett** is the only human in the show; he performs every line for every character as well as narrating the show. You could say he pulls the strings... masterfully.

At first glance the set seemed abstract, until *Ivy* walked on stage and it was all thrown into perspective. It's a simple, miniature world that **Burkett** manipulates as a poet would a verse. Scenes flow from one to the next where minor set changes are seamless and complemented by the shows lighting design and soundtrack.

This was my first encounter with **Burkett** and I feel that it will stay with me for the rest of my life. What **Burkett** is doing for the art of puppetry is similar to that which the Japanese Anime has done for cartoons; lifting puppetry out of a typecast association as solely a form for children and establishing it as adult art; an arena within which social, cultural and political issues can be explored.

Experiencing **Ronnie Burkett's Theatre of Marionettes** was like going to a restaurant, ordering a meal I'd never tried and being pleasantly surprised at how great it tasted. **10 Days on Earth** is not like anything you would have ever seen before and is an opportunity to see a contemporary master of his medium in the flesh. On top of this it is a beautiful and chilling tale that will take you on a journey across a range of emotions and leave you questioning how a cast of puppets could be so emotionally disarming.

10 Days on Earth

Created and performed by Ronnie Burkett

Theatre of Marionettes

Venue: Playhouse | Sydney Opera House

Dates: 15 February – 3 March

Times: Tues, 6.30pm; Wed to Sat, 8pm; Sun 5pm

Tickets: \$48 / \$38

Post Show Artists Talk: Tues 29 February

Bookings: 02 9250 7777 | sydneyoperahouse.com

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