



The Dudes ready to dropkick the country

The Dudes

With *Elephant Island* and *The James Murdoch Band*
Thursday, 19 October at 9pm
Sidetrack Café

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Arts & Entertainment Writer

There's much to learn about Calgarian foursome The Dudes, whose love for music and unpretentiousness has brought them out of the prairies and buzzing into the Western Canadian music scene. Unaffected by the superficiality associated with the music industry, vocalist and guitarist Dan Vacon has become accustomed to a simpler lifestyle, and says that the band's primary focus is its music.

"I think I've probably grown a bit as a songwriter, but the approach has always been the same," Vacon says of their new album, *Brain, Heart, Guitar*. "You just sit down with your guitar, bang it out, say what you're feeling and hope it sounds alright. That's always been my approach and it's

worked so far."

He adds that the sound for the album is appropriately influenced by both the workings of the brain and the sentiments of the heart.

"It's hard to say for sure how much you're influenced by the things that you love and how much of it is naturally coming out of wherever things come out of you," Vacon says. "It's definitely a mix of both."

With that degree of passion, it's no surprise that The Dudes' musical career is finally picking up speed with video shoots, a song in a TV commercial and, more recently, the video debut for their single, "Dropkick Queen of the Weekend," on MuchMusic. For Vacon, everything has changed.

"We're all of a sudden getting so much respect and attention. We've been approached by two video companies who shot two videos for us this summer, and we're on weird mainstream radio in the west.

"We've gotten signed through EMI distribution, and throughout the States there are tons of things that are possibly

happening," Vacon continues. "Things are taking off. It's kind of like we're being stretched back in a giant sling-shot, just ready to get to work."

The sudden rush of interest in the group can be, in part, attributed to the Rogers Wireless commercial, in which "Dropkick" is played. Although, after obtaining such a gig, when most up-and-coming bands would deem themselves as officially recognized artists, Vacon views it as an opportunity to pay the bills and to make more music.

"Well, from a financial perspective, that's important for us," Vacon states. "I worked all winter as a bike messenger. That's kind of what I always do. I work hard during the winter and save as much money as I can so I can take as much songwriting time off as possible.

"That Rogers commercial for me was just an awesome opportunity," he relates. "Hopefully I won't have to go back to work through the winter. Instead, we can tour, and I can just write and hopefully I can come up with something great."

While finances seem to be a lingering

concern for many aspiring musicians, Vacon is content with his glamour-free lifestyle, and is grateful that he has the opportunity to do what he loves.

"I've kind of learned to live on a super poverty budget, you know," he chuckles. "Like, honestly, I can get by. I probably make nine, ten thousand dollars a year, I'm guessing. That's right at the poverty line, but I don't work half the year and we get to tour.

"I do have this cool little apartment downtown and it costs nothing," Vacon continues.

Life, according to Vacon, doesn't seem too shabby at the moment; however, The Dudes can't help but look toward the future, planning tours and keeping projects in the works. Vacon admits he has his own solo project underway, with two albums' worth of music to work with.

"It's with another band called The Killer Bees, so there's no shortage of areas to focus on," Vacon says.

But by no means is Vacon leaving the group. In fact, the Dudes have plans to wander fields beyond Alberta, tackling

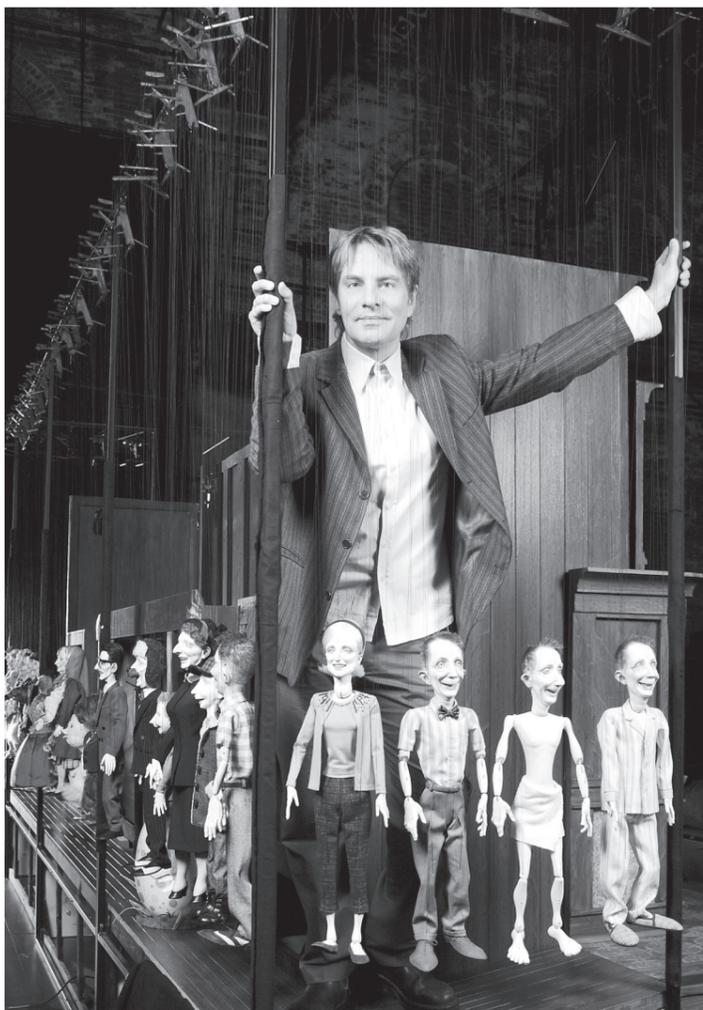
Eastern Canada, and maybe even the United States; he knows they still have a long way to go in order to really chalk up more Dudes fans.

"I think we've got a fairly decent Western Canadian following, but from Winnipeg to Toronto, there's just this giant noman's land of nothing," Vacon explains. "So we aren't very well-known, or not nearly as well-known in those parts.

"The plan is actually to move to Toronto after winter for maybe two-and-a-half months or so, just to get our foot in the door and get the word spread around the east," he continues. "We can do so many places in the Toronto market and hop over to Montréal and down to the States pretty easily that way."

In the meantime, The Dudes are pumped to perform Thursday's show, and Vacon leaves a final message for his Edmonton fans.

"We apologize for forsaking the talent up north for so long and we're ready to pay retribution," Vacon says. "We're ready to put on a good show."



Burkett's strung out on puppets

10 Days On Earth

Written and Performed by Ronnie Burkett
Runs 19 October-26 November
The Roxy

DANA KOMPERDO
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Critically acclaimed Albertan Ronnie Burkett returns to Edmonton with his new play, *10 Days On Earth*. Founder of the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes, he's no ordinary writer; he performs his plays alone, via his hand-crafted marionettes, and he's glad to be back here among his fans.

"Being in a place like Edmonton where I've performed for 25 years, there's an audience here that has actually seen everything I've done," Burkett says.

After a lifelong interest in puppetry—which began at the mere age of seven—Burkett made a career out of his passion for performance. By 14, he was touring the province, and after more training, his work evolved into something more than a hobby. Since going full time and the creation of his theatre company, Burkett has written and performed numerous plays that have won several international

awards, including the Village Voice OBIE Award for off-Broadway theatre.

Burkett is involved in all aspects of the production, both in preparation for the play and in its performance. A large cast of puppets—twelve in this case—means he needs to embody twelve different characters.

"It's kind of like a really intense play done completely in one's head," Burkett says. "It actually entails all of the disciplines you would have as an actor, plus you have to work the puppets and do all the different voices plus juggle all the balls so, um, it's fantastic."

Despite the fact that Burkett designs and builds his entire marionette cast, that doesn't mean he's too biased toward his own creations.

"My favorite puppet was a character that I think a lot of people have forgotten about, except if they were my age," Burkett recalls. "There was a CBC show when I was a kid called *Hi Diddle Day*, and the main character, Mrs Gertrude Diddle, to this day, remains my favorite puppet."

"I just thought she was so glamorous," Burkett emphasizes. "You can keep your fucking Casey and Finnegan."

Regardless of the more common theme of the puppet show, Burkett's

10 Days On Earth isn't designed for children.

"Until puppeteers become better actors and writers, puppetry will always remain in some sort of children's ghetto, really."

Burkett, meanwhile, aims to expand the genre of the adult-themed puppet theatre. Burkett's *10 Days* revolves around a mentally challenged man, Darrel, who doesn't notice that his mother has died in her sleep.

"So for about a week and a half, he just carries on in the world because he doesn't know that he's alone all of a sudden," Burkett explains. "By routine and by his mother's example and lessons, he just carries on."

The play encompasses a range of emotions. It's not only a sad play, but it's also lighthearted and silly. *10 Days* is populated by highly developed and engaging characters—despite the fact that they're all attached to strings—and Burkett hopes his audience will leave touched by the personalities.

"I have to hit all those emotional levels even though the actors aren't real and they're not people," Burkett says. "I think people in the audience can react very strongly because of that fact. They are just little icons that we pour our own humanity into."