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## FRINGE REVIEW – Sticks, Stones, Broken Bones (Underbelly)



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On the face of it, *Stick, Stones, Broken Bones* is a shadow puppet show. But this simplistic description does not do justice to either the show itself or the path that creator Jeff Achtem has taken to develop his work.

Growing up in a “hippie environment”, television was banned in the Achtem household. So young Jeff spent his time in exploratory play, including experiments with light sources where he would take a projector apart, alter and reassemble it.

This deep grounding in play, along with a stint in film school, and a decade of street performance and clowning, have all informed *Sticks, Stones, Broken Bones*. One thing Achtem has not studied in depth is puppetry. Which means his puppets, created through (you guessed it) play and experimentation with a range of materials. are unlike any you may have seen before.

The show is a series of short tableaux featuring comic characters with which audiences can immediately identify. As well as being genuinely funny and endearing, this show is technically fascinating for the way in which Achtem makes the “nuts and bolts” of his puppetry part of the performance. Most props are visible onstage throughout, with other puppets created before our eyes. Curious children and adults alike will love being able to compare the puppets onscreen with the omnidextrous Achtem’s contortions as he brings his characters to life.

Achtem closes the show with a reminder that “there is always time to play” and indeed he has brought out the child in his audience. The one reluctant audience member who has been brought onstage soon falls under Achtem’s spell and seems to be having the time of his life by the time his stint is finished!

This show is nothing short of magical. It’s bound to inspire children with a creative or curious bent, but adults will be equally enchanted. For those keen to have a play themselves, Achtem even has plans to include how-tos and puppetry play tips on his website soon.

**5-29 Aug (not 17)**

