WATCH THE LIPS

A short play

by

Eric Coble
WATCH THE LIPS

CHARACTERS:

SAMMY FULWOOD: A Ventriloquist with Wares to Sell.

MR. McBUFFER: A Dummy with a Chip on his Shoulder.
WATCH THE LIPS  
featuring  
Sammy Fulwood and Mr. McBuffer

(SAMMY FULWOOD, in a nice suit, enters with MR. MCBUFFER, his human-sized dummy in a tuxedo. They sit, McBuffer on Fulwood’s knee with Fulwood’s hand on his back, smiling at the audience)

SAMMY  
Thank you! I’m Sammy Fulwood-

MCBUFFER  
But they say I’m the one full of wood!

SAMMY  
This is Mr. McBuffer. Say hello, Mr. McBuffer.

MCBUFFER  
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. And may I say what a pleasure it is to see so many well-heeled and cash-infused members of society in our midst!

SAMMY  
Mr. McBuffer-

MCBUFFER  
Not like the lowlife we had to deal with back in Sheep Springs last week. My lord! We didn’t even bring out the Freak Act -- just set up a mirror facing the audience and left the stage for twenty minutes.

SAMMY  
Mr. McBuffer, that’s not polite.

MCBUFFER  
These folks can handle it. They’re classy!

SAMMY  
Indeed they are. And speaking of classy, before we get to our act, we’d like to remind you about our kiosk in the lobby-

MCBUFFER  
The one with the big sign: “McBuffer Enterprises”.

SAMMY  
If you like what you’re seeing on stage, we have a full range of cute, clever, and quality memorabilia for your purchase there.
MCBUFFER
Little pieces of joy to remind you of the evening’s delights!

SAMMY
Like T-shirts! Lordy, do we have T-shirts!

MCBUFFER
With my face, Sammy’s face, the theater’s logo, and sassy phrases like “Read My Lips: Theatre Is Alive And Well”, and “My Local Critic Went To Our Theatre And All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt”!

SAMMY
And we have souvenir programs and books–

MCBUFFER
To remind you of what you thought would be memorable!

SAMMY
And Mr. McBuffer mugs and cups–

MCBUFFER
And shot glasses to help you forget what you fear may be memorable!

(Sammy gives him a slight nudge, but forges ahead)

SAMMY
And CD’s -- the original cast recording of our production tonight–

MCBUFFER
Ooooo. Imagine hitting repeat and hearing my voice over and over and over and–

SAMMY
Ha ha ha! We also have videos and DVD’s of tonight’s performance–

MCBUFFER
So you can skip right to our act and hear my voice over and over and over and–

SAMMY
No need to wade through an entire production when you can jump right to the fireworks!

MCBUFFER
Now you can enjoy the luxury of theatre even if you have the attention span of a wooden puppet.

(Turns to Sammy)
What do you have against wooden puppets?
SAMMY
We like to think waiting is a bygone pastime, don’t we, Mr. McBuffer?

MCBUFFER
I liked to think ventriloquism was a bygone pastime, but your hand’s still up my ass, Fulwood.

SAMMY
Ha ha ha! Well, we, ah, we also have Starbucks Gift Certificates! In 5, 10, and $500 increments!

MCBUFFER
That $500 gift certificate will get you two coffees and a scone at the airport.

SAMMY
And we have more!

MCBUFFER
Too much more.

(Sammy gives McBuffer a quick look, but races on...)

SAMMY
McBuffer golf balls, key chains, snow-globes, watches, and dog dishes!

MCBUFFER
Jesus.

SAMMY
We even have all your pharmaceutical needs, straight from Canada at discounted prices!

MCBUFFER
What, in case they missed the online offer on that one?

SAMMY
Pills to chill, pills to thrill-

MCBUFFER
Ask for’em by color.

SAMMY
 Heck, we’ve even got the patented McBuffer pills to cure your erectile dysfunction!

Oh. This is where I’m supposed to make some joke about wood.

(Still grinning)
It’s all in the lobby, folks! All major credit cards accepted! Be happy! You deserve it!

Or not.

(Still grinning)
...what?

What the hell are we doing, Fulwood?

This is the start of the routine, Mr. McBuffer. This is what we do.

I know that. I’ve been propped on your goddam lap for 12-1/2 years. I know the routine.

Well-

Well, we’re hawking dog dishes and erectile dysfunction, Fulwood. You tell me this is what you thought we’d be doing when you checked out that first ventriloquism book from Ruth N. Bond Elementary School?

Mr. McBuffer- 

This is it? This is the top? Key chains and snow-globes?

We’re bringing joy and happiness to-

-to the owners of the landfill.

Listen-

What do we get, like a 6% cut?
SAMMY

McBuffer...

MCBUFFER
It’s not worth it, Sammy. It’s not worth the breath we spend pushing this crap-

SAMMY
We get to see the world, Mr. McBuffer. The customers get quality goods made in China-

MCBUFFER
And our souls get harder and harder and colder and colder ‘til they’re charcoaled popcorn that cooked for an hour in a cheap-ass McBuffer microwave.

SAMMY
I don’t think this is the time-

MCBUFFER
When is the time? When you’re backstage downing a bottle of Boone’s Farm to get you through another performance?

SAMMY
Mr. McBuffer...

MCBUFFER
You can’t even bring yourself to sell this shit. You need a dummy to do your dirty work.

SAMMY
I do not!

You do too!

(Sammy grabs McBuffer’s throat)

SAMMY
Shut up, you little wooden asshole!

MCBUFFER
Yeah, that’s it. Choke the puppet.

SAMMY
We’re giving people what they want!! Is that so wrong??

MCBUFFER
Who can’t sleep at night, Fulwood? You or the wooden head?

SAMMY
Shut up! Shut up!!
MCBUFFER
I’ll hack off my own leg and sell it for firewood before I shill another piece of your crap-

(Sammy CHOKES Mr. McBuffer--)

SAMMY
Shut up! Just shut up, you self-righteous little blockhead!! You happy now, Mr. Puppet? Are you happy now??

MCBUFFER
(Simultaneous)
We’re selling crap! It’s all crap! We’re selling crap-

(McBuffer BREAKS FREE to stand on his own)

MCBUFFER (CONT’D)
-and I’m not gonna do it anymore!!

(They stare at each other... in shock... realization...)

MCBUFFER (CONT’D)
...well this is an interesting turn of events.

SAMMY
I’m... ah...

MCBUFFER
Could I have done that anytime I wanted?

SAMMY
I don’t... I...

MCBUFFER
I guess more importantly are you gonna keep selling key chains and coffee mugs?

SAMMY
I... it’s what we do.

MCBUFFER
What you do. I think I just got the go-ahead to follow my little wooden bliss.

(He starts off... stops)

MCBUFFER (CONT’D)
Look at it this way: Now you get to move your own lips.

(And he’s out of there)
(Sammy turns to us... attempts a smile... blinks... opens and closes his mouth uselessly... clears his throat. Smiles. Opens his mouth...)  

(Blackout.)