

AFTER THE QUAKE
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The signature experience shared by one and all persons who have lived any length of time in California involves the rumble and shake of the earthquake. Just this week a 4.3 short, sharp shocker rocked the place. So it is no surprise that a play featuring the disastrous Hanshin earthquake of 1995 would pull in the masses here.

The author of the work on which this play is based (Haruki Murakami) refers also to another disaster which occurred that year a month later: the Aum

Shinrikyo gas attack in the Toyko subway system which killed 12 people outright, severely harmed another 54, and probably injured another 4,000 people.

The Aum Shinrikyu was a cult originally founded on Buddhist tenets, but which gradually became more extreme as time went on. The gas attack was meant to divert police attention away from the cult's activities.

Adaptor and Director Frank Galati has fashioned out of two stories contained in the novel an intriguing play about the struggle between the healing power of the Imagination and destructive power of emotional trauma.

Junpei, Takasuki, and Sayoko form a friendship bond during their undergraduate days at Kobe University. Their triangle morphs into something else when the shy and withdrawn Junpei fails to express his love for Sayoko, who then marries the outgoing and athletic Katagiri. Although the couple has a child, named "Sala", Junpei remains a "family friend" right through the eventual divorce, often coming over in the middle of the night to tell stories to Sala (played with sweet innocence by (Madison Logan V. Phan) so as to quiet the child. The nine-year old Sala has fits of screaming and insomnia, complaining about the "Earthquake Man" coming to put everyone into a "box".



It is during one of these episodes Junpei, who has become a moderately successful writer of short stories, creates a fiction about a six-foot tall frog who comes to save Tokyo from a gigantic worm. ("Same thing happens every time. I write a story. The story is published in a magazine. Nobody reads it.")



Frog (played by suave and erudite Keong Sim) pays a visit to humble bank employee Katagiri (Paul Juhn) to enlist his aid in combatting a giant worm who Frog says will cause a giant earthquake that will destroy Tokyo and kill hundreds of thousands of people.

Paul Juhn also doubles as the writer Junpei, shifting from intellectual to hapless salaryman with the aid of a wrinkled raincoat and thick hornrim glasses and a sort of hangdog, befuddled expression that seems to have been pasted on the salaryman's face for his entire life.

"You know why my bosses send me down here (to the bad section of town)? Because I am worthless. You know why the thugs and hookers leave me alone? Because they think I must be either totally crazy or a real tough cookie,"

Katagiri tells the audience. "You know why I keep coming here? Because I am crazy and worthless and don't care what happens to me."



Parallel to this story of "Superfrog" is a story about Honeybear, who finding a bucket on his mountain, goes to the city to sell honey in an open plaza. The bear story, while evocative at moments, fails to resolve, but does allow us to see Junpei's development as an artist and as a person in his relationship to Sala and to Sayoko (Jennifer Shin).



Many critics have pointed to some "he said, she said" lines in the play as examples of how the adaptor has failed in translating writerly passages to the stage. These critics fail to make the connection between such constructions and the habit, developed most notably by August Strindberg and absorbed by Asian dramatists, of having characters vocalize aspects of their unconscious in a way that never occurs "in reality". Indeed the Jungian version of the Unconscious permeates the play so much it could be added as an additional character.

This technique allows for presentation of certain visuals that would be otherwise either impossible or ridiculous to depict literally on stage, such as the moment when Frog's body erupts with streams of nauseating creatures that attack Katagiri.



Much about the play concerns the realm of the Imagination and its necessary inclusion to a life. And the life that persists without imagination is both

one of loathing and self-loathing as early on, the salaryman Katagiri states: "Who am I? I am nothing. I don't do anything except eat, sleep and shit!"

Indeed even the set design, a spartan bare stage with jet black boards and an immense arch overhead forces the audience to fill the space with the images culled by the actors speaking their lines. The Kobe earthquake, when it does occur, occurs via the magic of dolby surroundsound in the form of a deep 20 second-long rumble.

You could see all down the line the hands of people who had survived the Loma Prieta and the earlier LA quake of the 70's gripping their armrests.

The overall effect is one of evocation of personal memories of lost love, wordlessness in the face of powerful emotions, fear of the unnameable and the unknowable, luminous archetypes in the form of the wordless bear and the grotesque Superfrog, bittersweet melodies, painful self-realizations, and joy in small triumphs at last.

The play has been extended to December 2, as every performance has been selling out.

Haruki Murakami, Author
Frank Galati, Adaptor and Director
James Schuette, Scenic Design
Mara Blumenfeld, Costume Design
James F. Ingalls, Lighting Design
Andre Pluess & Ben Sussman, Sound Design & Original Composition
Malcolm Ewen, Stage Manager
Erica Daniels, Casting
Amy Potozkin, Casting
Marissa Wolf, Assistant Director
Keith Parham, Assistant Lighting Designer
Rick Sims, Assistant Sound Designer
Andre Pluess, Music Arranger

Jeff Wichmann, Music Arranger
Jason McDermott, Music Arranger

Keong Sim, Narrator / Frog
Hanson Tse, Junpei
Gemma Megumi Fa-Kaji, Sala
Madison Logan V. Phan, Sala
Jennifer Shin, Sayoko / Nurse
Paul H. Juhn, Katagiri / Takatsuki

Jason McDermott, Cello
Jeff Wichmann, Koto

Kevine Berne, Scene photographer
Michael Brosilow, Program and Press photographer