

# Istvan Dugalin

Theatre Reviewer



HOME ABOUT ISTVAN VISION CONTACT

Posted by [istvandugalin](#) on February 13, 2024

## Istvan Reviews ► EARWORM — Nowadays Theatre | Crow's Theatre

Posted in: Theatre Reviews. [Leave a comment](#)



Aida Keykhahi in "Earworm", Photo by Dahlia Katz

Ever since *The Only Possible Way* back in 2019, I've caught a handful of [Nowadays Theatre](#) productions and have been consistently intrigued by [Mohammad Yaghoubi](#)'s work. An Iranian immigrant, he pulls his home country's fraught circumstances into his plays, allows them to fester and forges them into innovative and insightful theatrical shape. Though this word gets bandied about ubiquitously, Yaghoubi is an authentic *Brechtian*, confidently employing meta-theatrical devices, not as a stylish gimmick, but in a way that feels purposeful, urgent and galvanizing.

**[Earworm](#)**, a co-production with [Crow's Theatre](#), is the first play I've seen of his I'd call a *thriller*. Giving it a genre signifier feels a little reductive,

### Search

### Categories

Select Category

### Follow Istvan



### Subscribe to Istvan!

Email Address

Follow

but certainly apt. When we first meet Homa (**Aida Keykhai**) and her son, Pendar (**Amir Maghami**); their domestic banter is familiar and amusing. We sense both their mutual love and exasperation. Lost keys and a yapping dog are a light lead-in to their shared life; tension mounts as Homa's traumatic backstory is gradually revealed and the second act thrusts them into danger.

Keykhai is a firmly grounded and impassioned presence. Her portrait of Homa—devoted mother and outspoken activist—contains multitudes that are carefully balanced and revealed with naturalism and grace. She's a modest yet assertive bad-ass, diligently challenging herself and her son. When Pendar requests she wear hijab to satisfy his conservative fiancé and her father, it causes a rift between them and begins a deeper conversation about trust, responsibility and personal integrity.

Maghami's Pendar is as vexing as he is endearing. A good-natured and gentle soul, he has a tendency to needle and patronize. Like his mother, he's working through the interwoven and often conflicting pressures of religion, family, and romance—Iran looms large over them, even in Canada. Geographically removed, Iran is never *at a distance* psychologically.

Homa has a podcast in which she opposes the current Islamic regime, tells her audience—*us* in the theatre; and her unseen, in-story listeners—about various topics including her complicated history with Islam, with being a rebellious woman navigating two different societies. The spectre of Sahar Khodayari, the “Blue Girl,” is conjured and haunts the story. We hear some of her listeners' responses and these testimonial clips give a sense of her impact on the community, but when one of them pleads for Homa to be careful, we get our first inkling of threat.

In the second act, surprises abound. The first of which is Fatemeh (**Parya Heravi**), Pendar's betrothed. Our affection for her grows as we realize she's far more understanding of his mother's attitudes than Pendar's impression suggested. Even her father, Mohammad (**Amir Zavosh**), isn't the man we expected—seemingly humble and diminutive, allowing his daughter to call the shots.

As this pre-marriage dinner party progresses, Homa's behaviour becomes increasingly worrisome. Awkward conversation gives way to suspense and devastating revelations. It is here that the play begins to nod—perhaps intentionally—towards Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, in which a former political prisoner in an unnamed South American country must grapple with the identity of a *stranger* who, well, *isn't*. Zavosh is particularly unnerving here, allowing us an uncomfortable glimpse at vile intentions in a timid and soft-spoken guise.

As the story unfolds with a steady naturalism, Yaghoubi pulls us out with deliberately *fourth-wall breaking* asides. Sometimes the characters address us, sometimes the actors themselves, referencing the playwright and his intentions. **Amin Shirazi**'s minimalist set features very unassuming white furniture pieces; the mundane lack of colour becomes thematically relevant later on. It also provides a canvas for colourful flourishes to pop out as significant. Homa's beautiful outfits are stunning and express her assertive, playful nature. Green and red elements in particular—alluding to Iran's flag—resonant. Imagery projected on the back wall, designed by **Honey Hoseiny** and **Arman Moghadam**, provide further visual interest and *Brechtian* immersion.

With its complex, persuasive characters and pointed self-awareness, **Earworm** is a deeply considered, intense and compassionate piece of theatre.

### **Earworm**

running February 6 to February 25, 2024

**Streetcar Crowsnest**, Studio Theatre (345 Carlaw Avenue)

running time: 2 hours (plus intermission)



Amir Maghami, Amir Zavosh, Aida Keykhai and Parya Heravi in "Earworm", Photo by Dahlia Katz

← Istvan Reviews ► DION: A  
ROCK OPERA — Coal Mine  
Theatre

Istvan Reviews ► AS I MUST LIVE  
IT — Theatre Passe Muraille |  
Modern Times Stage →

**Leave a Reply**