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Nowadays Theatre's "Earworm"

HOMA BELIEVES THAT SHE HAS FINALLY FOUND SAFETY IN HER new home of Toronto, Canada, but when she comes face to face with a dark figure from her past, everything she knows is suddenly in question. Writer and director Mohammad Yaghoubi's *Earworm* talks about all this and so much more in its world premiere in association with Crow's Theatre. With select performances being performed in Persian (Farsi) with English Surtitles along with the English Language performances, there are several ways to explore this engaging new work.

Earworm tells the story of Homa, an Iranian immigrant who has settled in Toronto with her son Pendar. Homa has a podcast, where she talks about life in Iran, along with her life in Toronto. Pendar is devoted to a young lady named Fatemeh, whom he wishes to marry. He's even looking after her dog while her father is visiting from Iran, much to Homa's dismay and distraction. Everything goes awry when Homa realizes that she knows Fatemeh's father from somewhere. What's unique is that after this point, the play actually has two possible endings: the original one Yaghoubi wrote several years ago, and a new one which resulted as a response to the violence against women experienced in Iran in 2022. Using the same text but in two VERY different ways, Yaghoubi gives back the agency to the incredible female characters he's written in the second ending.



(<https://aviewfromthebox.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/earworm-photobydahliakatz-0252.jpg>)

Aida Keykhai

Photo by Dahlia Katz

Homa's podcast provides a very interesting interactive element to the production. At times, Homa asks the audience questions, which we answer by show of hands; she even allows us to choose which episode we'd like to hear out of two choices, making each opportunity to see this production a unique one. These moments are very important as they not only provide background information on the characters themselves, but also allow for a greater understanding about the context in which Yaghoubi is writing from as well. In such a small space, the direct address in these portions is fitting, and gives us a degree of intimacy with Homa which we don't get with the other characters.



(<https://aviewfromthebox.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/earworm-photobydahliakatz-0855.jpg>).

Parya Heravi, Amir Maghami

Photo by Dahlia Katz

Amin Shirazi's set design is simple yet effective. The contrast between the brightly patterned pillows and tablecloths with the stark white furniture is representative of Homa's mental and emotional state. The cork boards in the first act full of Homa's ideas for her podcast are a great addition to the set; it totally makes sense that as a creative person she'd have little sticky notes everywhere with ideas for future episodes and what to research etc. When the notion of The White Room is introduced at the end of the play, the set design takes on a whole new and profound meaning; it's clear that a piece of Homa never truly left that room at all. The team of Ali Mostolizadeh, Honey Hoseiny, and Arman Moghadam, who worked on the videography and video mapping are extraordinary. The use of projection throughout the piece allowed us to have multiple languages being understood simultaneously, with Persian captions appearing during the messages left for Homa

by her listeners, and English surtitles appear throughout the Persian language performances. It also gives the podcast portions a feel as if we're watching a YouTube video, with plenty of graphics and clips to back up what Homa is talking about.



(<https://aviewfromthebox.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/earworm-photobydahliakatz-0601.jpg>).

Aida Keykhai
Photo by Dahlia Katz

The women of *Earworm* give particularly powerhouse performances. Aida Keykhai stars as Homa, and she is riveting from start to finish. Whether she's chiding her son for losing his keys (again) or scared for her life at seeing her tormentor once more, Keykhai delivers an emotional, stirring performance. She is matched by Parma Heravi who plays Fatemeh. Only appearing in act two, Heravi certainly makes an impression with the time she's on stage; her performances in the two ending scenes are so vastly different, yet whether it's fear or power, Heravi delivers the lines with passion and poise. Amer Maghami's Pendar and Amir Zavosh's Mohammad provide interesting foils for the female characters of the play. While both certainly hold their own in their roles, their dynamics were different from that of Keykhai and Heravi. When all four actors are on stage together, the scene has the perfect tension of a couple's parents meeting for the first time, and their performances play off of each other very well.



(<https://aviewfromthebox.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/earworm-photobydahliakatz-1144.jpg>)

Parya Heravi
Photo by Dahlia Katz

It's fabulous that they're performing this play in both languages, and while the Persian performances are more scarce, there are still a few left in the run. *Earworm* is intriguing and powerful, and considering how the play has changed from its initial inception until now, I'm looking forward to seeing what it could become in the future. For more information and tickets, visit:

<https://www.crowstheatre.com/whats-on/view-all/earworm>
(<https://www.crowstheatre.com/whats-on/view-all/earworm>)

Cover Photo: (from l-r) Amir Maghami, Amir Zavosh, Aida Keykhaii, Parya Heravi.
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