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Review: EARWORM

by [Lynn](#) on ~~February 18, 2024~~

in [The Passionate Playgoer](#)

Live and in person at the Streetcar Crowsnest, Toronto. A Nowadays Theatre Production in association with Crow's Theatre. Playing until March 3, 2024.

www.crowstheatre.com

Written and directed by Mohammad Yaghoubi

Set by Amin Shirazi

Lighting by David DeGrow

Sound by Sina Shoaie

Photographer and videographer, Ali Mostolizadeh

Cast: Parya Heravi

Aida Keykhaii

Amir Maghami

Amir Zavosh

Mohammad Yaghoubi illuminates life in Iran and Canada from the point of view of Homa who embraces her freedom in Canada to express herself.

The Story. Homa is a stylish woman who emigrated from Iran to Canada. We get the sense from what she says that she found Iran oppressive to women and free speech. She revels in her life in Canada. She produces a podcast in which she muses on politics, ethics, freedom of speech etc.

Her adult son, Pendar lives with her but there is a complication. Pendar has a girlfriend, Fatemeh, who has a pet dog.

Fatemeh's father is visiting from Iran and is strict about his culture and religion and feels the dog is unclean. So the dog is living with Homa and Pendar, temporarily. Homa is not happy about this since she walks the dog, but she wants to do right for her son.

Fatemeh invites Homa and Pendar for a meal to meet her father. Homa and Pendar spend some time discussing what she should wear. Homa knows that Fatemeh's father will want her to wear the hijab and she objects to Pendar, but eventually reaches a compromise after much discussion. When Homa is at Fatemeh's place, her father doesn't look at Homa because she is a woman. But Homa looks at him and thinks there is something familiar about him. And so a mystery is established about the father. The play explores that and lots of other ideas.

The Production. Writer-director Mohammad Yaghoubi is from Iran and came to Canada in 2015. I've been lucky to see his earlier plays: *Winter of 88* and *Heart of a Dog*. Those plays reflected life in Iran. With *Earworm* he has opened up his focus to include life in Canada and Iran and thus broaden his audience reach. *Earworm* has some performances in Farsi with English surtitles, and most other performances are in English with the occasional Farsi translation. The audience is never disadvantaged by not knowing what is being said or read. Mohammad Yaghoubi takes care of his audiences. Scenes are titled and the name is projected in English and Farsi on the screened back wall of Amin Shirazi's stylish set.

In fact, Mohammad Yaghoubi wanted to open up his play to include a broader audience and not just Iranians, so all audiences are welcome to experience a voice who writes about a world we might not be familiar with.

The first Act has a lot of banter between Homa, beautifully played by Aida Keykhahi (*Fertility Slippers*, *Heart of a Dog*, *Winter of 88* and *Swim Team*, this last as a director) and Pendar (Amir Maghami) who is always fiddling with his cell phone. He is devoted to his girlfriend Fatemeh (Parya Heravi)—they are always texting.

We also find out that Homa is invited with Pendar to Fatemeh's apartment for dinner to meet her father. This will be tricky. Homa is a modern woman who dresses like she pleases. She knows that Fatemeh's father is traditional in his ways and how he expects women to dress, i.e. to wear the hijab. She decides on a compromise but getting there is rather funny.

Homa is a take charge woman. She is proud of her uncompromising podcasts and the people who write her, usually from Iran, are grateful for her honesty.

At times Homa directly addresses the audience for comment. Homa believes that in Canada she can express her opinion and not lose her job. She asks the audience what they think. We have seen a lot of upheaval in our world of late, so the spread of opinions is interesting.

Act II is takes place in Fatemeh's apartment where we meet her father, Mohammad, played by Amir Zavosh, who is quiet speaking and hardly looks at Homa because she is a woman. Homa stares at him with a puzzled look on her face. Aida Keykhahi as Homa is watchful, perhaps a bit agitated. He seems familiar but she can't place him until she does.

Earworm has echoes in it of *Death and the Maiden*, Ariel Dorfman's Chilean drama about a man who brings home a good Samaritan one night who helped him when his car breaks down. The man's wife hears them come in and recognizes the Samaritan's voice, which conjures all sorts of memories for her, all terrible.

Playwright Mohammad Yaghoubi shines a light on Iran, its rigidity in how differently women are treated from men. The culture is rich and that's illuminated too. In *Earworm* we also see the very dark side of what Homa left behind when she came to Canada and that is revealed slowly but relentlessly.

And in a truly theatrical turn, Mohammad Yaghoubi provides two endings to the play, and when you see the play, you see why. I thought that was fascinating. He makes one look at theatre in a different light and perspective rather than what we think a play should be and how it should be structured.

I love being unbalanced by a gifted playwright and director—and in this instance I didn't mind that Mohammad Yaghoubi is both the writer and director here because he pulls it off beautifully.

A Nowadays Theate Production in association with Crow's Theatre presents:

Plays until March 3, 2024.

Running time: 2 hours (1 intermission)

www.crowstheatre.com

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