

I Came To Look For You On Tuesday

By Howard Miller

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Amir Darvish, McKenna Kerrigan, and Susan Hyon.
Photo by Ellise Lesser.

Painful memories permeate the lives of the characters inhabiting *I Came To Look For You On Tuesday*, the poignant yet unsentimental puzzle box of a play by Chiori Miyagawa, opening tonight at La MaMa's First Floor Theatre in the East Village.

I Came To Look For You On Tuesday relates the stories of survivors of disasters, both natural (earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, and tornado), and man-made (war). The impetus for the writing was the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that took a devastating toll on Japan.

But Ms. Miyagawa is interested in moving us beyond the specific. She has taken great care to set the action in a series of locales with names

like "Inland Country" and "Desert Country" and "Flat Country." The deliberate selection of a multi-ethnic cast serves as well to prevent the audience from imposing its own specificity, and the playwright uses a true-to-memory free association of time, in which a character may be 50 years old in one scene, and six years old in the next. Projected text keeps the audience grounded from scene to scene.

Despite the play's context, it is not the characters' anguish that the playwright has set out to examine; rather it is the impact that their anguish has had on them.

These are victims of sudden acts of destruction that violently and with little warning ripped them from their loved ones, their homes, and the predictability of their existence.

Their stories as they gradually unfold remind us of the fragility of life, and the importance of paying heed to the choices we make, particularly as these relate to our interactions with others. Some of the characters have learned to accept what has happened to them and have been able to get on with their lives. Others have altered their memories to blot out what they cannot face. Still others are mired in the moment that their lives were upturned.

Although the play is told in seemingly disjointed scenes and embraces a non-naturalistic style, it does have a powerfully emotional core in the story of Maia, who has spent her life seeking to recover from an incident that she experienced as an infant.

The play keeps returning to Maia, who has coped and found strength from a mythology she clings to, of “Adelain, goddess of light,” whom she equates with her mother, lost to her at the moment of her own salvation. As in another myth, that of Pandora, Maia’s story leaves us with the gift of hope, that illogical thing that allows us to make it through the rough seas.

I Came To Look For You On Tuesday is beautifully written, filled with poetic images that Ms. Miyagawa uses to weave together seemingly disparate stories into a logical, cohesive whole, where you will come to understand perfectly well why the play opens with a conversation between a mother and daughter who are both the same age, and why it is apt that Maia cleaves to the image of Adelain fighting the roaring tiger cat.

Under the direction of Alice Reagan, the eight cast members - Alexis Camins, Ugo Chukwu, Amir Darvish, Rachael Holmes, Susan Hyon, McKenna Kerrigan, Meg MacCary and Jens Rasmussen - are uniformly strong, with Ms. Kerrigan a standout as Maia, capturing her character’s strengths as well as her vulnerabilities. Most of the performers play multiple roles, and they do an excellent job of making swift shifts in posture and tone to accommodate character and age changes. Jiyoun Chang’s set design, with its strategically placed doorways, allow for the performers to come and go quickly, as in a memory.

All told, while the play is unconventional in style, it is both accessible and emotionally honest, and it will leave you thinking about it long after the cast members have taken their well-deserved bows.