

Herald Scotland

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The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

neil cooper



Theatre

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PUTTING a 600-page magical-realist Zen noir state-of-the-nation novel onstage in a multi-media two-hour mash-up of film, puppetry, shadowplay and live music isn't easy.

Director Stephen Earnhart has achieved this heroically, however, with his and co-writer Greg Pierce's slow-burning version of Japanese writer Haruki Murakami's 1995 epic, in which the tone is set from the off by a series of black-clad figures slow-walking onstage to make some tai chi style gestures before departing.

Ostensibly telling the story of how twenty-something urbanite Toru Okada's seemingly orderly life is usurped by a series of brief encounters he has no control over, and which plunge him into crisis, a woozy dreamstate slowly emerges from the goo. Up until now Toru has been sleepwalking his days away, but with the disappearance of his cat and his wife, he embarks on a mysterious David Lynch-style adventure as all around him offload their secret histories. Only at the bottom of a dried-up well can Toru get in touch with his secret self.

Performed in a mix of English and Japanese, Earnhart and his co-conspirators lead us through a beguilingly immersive experience that says much about the bridges between the personal and the public in a quest to reclaim one's identity, cultural or otherwise. Yet this is as ice-cool contemporary as it gets, with James Yaegashi's increasingly befuddled Toru forced to square up to a morass of corruption, bad TV and other rude intrusions.

All this is pulsed by Bora Yoon's beautifully paced percussive score in a disorientating meditation on how easy it is to lose people, the psychic scars they leave behind, and, ultimately, about letting go enough to move on.



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