



A Moment of Silence (Nowadays Theatre/Modern Times Stage Company/SummerWorks)

Factory Theatre Mainspace, 125 Bathurst Street, Sunday, August 7; 9:15 p.m.

Some could wish to sleep away from all the unpleasantness life can bring. But what if doing so made things even worse? For writer/director Mohammad Yaghoubi, the first English language translation for his celebrated play of the turbulence his country underwent in the early days of the Iranian Revolution, *A Moment of Silence*, is a triumph although a very doleful one at that for a lone woman's experience and a battle cry for freedom itself.

Awakening in 1980 Tehran, Shiva (Sarah Marchand) finds herself in an empty apartment and phoning for a husband and her brother who have mysteriously disappeared, but soon learns from her sisters Shirin (Parmida Kakavand) and Sheida (Melanie Pyne) much to her shock she'd been asleep for three years and slept through the downfall of the Shah and the rise of the ayatollahs that have permeated all aspects of Iranian life.

Also learning that Sheida had married her husband during her absence just to have a child plunges her back into another deep sleep and awakens in 1983 to a country at war with Iraq and a new shade of paranoia creeps into the life of a playwright Hasti (Lara Arabian) and her husband (Paul Van Dyck) when they become targets of the regime's crackdown on dissent from the country's artisans and intellectuals, resisting to be silent or go into exile.

By the time Shiva reawakens in 1987, all are driven to depression by the war and the ongoing crushing of civil liberties that are kept at bay, thanks to Shirin's cabdriver husband Jimmy (Maxime Robin) with his twisted sense of humour and outlook at life that'd rather be the lighted single candle than to curse the darkness enveloping them. Or, is this all in the mind and pages of Hasti's script she writes in while she's being hounded with verbal death threats from the Revolutionary Guard?

Torange Yeghiazarian makes an intelligent translation out of Yaghoubi's book and characters to follow, slipping in some projected surtitles to fill out the surrealism parts evenly and puts the cast on their toes with its sharp dialogue and fluid direction from dramaturg Matt Jones' doing. Marchand as the Rip van Winkle trying to make sense of a world she barely can make sense of and looks for a way to keep her sanity from going overboard is brilliant and tragic in her portrayal; Robin keeps it light at the play's court jester and consumes his role with a flourish; Pyne manages to present selfishness and guilt to be believable and Arabian and Van Dyck make for a loyally fine if somewhat foolhardy artisan couple managing to stick through thick and thin against the odds.

A Moment of Silence is a moving and stunning commentary on an Iran still grappling over the mistakes made in the name of revolutionary zealotry Yaghoubi unabashedly aims with a glaring spotlight at for audiences to ponder over what our basic civil rights should mean to us and defended over in this unflinching human drama.