

A MOMENT OF SILENCE (NOWADAYS THEATRE) 2016 SUMMERWORKS REVIEW

AUGUST 6, 2016 ALLISON GERSON



[A Moment of Silence](#) by Mohammad Yaghhobui is being presented by [Nowadays Theatre](#) at the [Factory Theatre Mainspace](#) as part of [SummerWorks 2016](#). The play is a slightly surreal exploration of what it means to live and write in Iran since the revolution of 1979.

As you enter theatre, you hear the foreboding beat of a tombak, an Iranian drum, being played live. The sense of fear is heightened as the play opens with woman frantically trying to understand why the phone numbers she is trying to call are not reaching the correct people. The problem is that Shiva has just awoken from a three-year sleep. In fact, she repeatedly falls asleep for years at a time, missing

the most important events in Iran and in her own life.

The play takes place in the years after the Iranian revolution, switching between scenes of Shiva and her family and scenes with Hasti, a playwright and intellectual who regularly receives death threats, and her husband, Sohrab. At first I was confused about the relationship between the two story lines and two sets of characters. I don't want to give it away, just know that eventually the link does become clear and things start to make a little more sense. Shiva's bouts of sleep are depicted as a relief, an escape from the horrible things happening in the world outside. Though she is terrified of falling back to sleep, her sisters tell her how lucky she is to be missing day-to-day life in Iran. Similarly, Hasti fantasizes about dying and being reincarnated in a better world where she is free to write without fear.

Though I found the Shiva storyline a little unbelievable, I was drawn to the characters. They felt real to me, and their humanity came through. I thought the actors were very strong and compelling. I particularly liked Lara Arabian's portrayal of Sohrab as both determined and vulnerable in the face of constant threat. I also enjoyed the interaction between Shirin (Parmida Kakavand), Shiraz's sister, and her husband Jimmy (Maxime Robin). Their affection seemed genuine and provided a bit of comic relief to the grim reality of their lives.

The simple set, just a few white door frames and boxes against a black backdrop, made the story seem universal, even though it is so specifically located in both time and place. And although we never actually see or hear bombing or violence, the threat and danger are cleverly conveyed through written stage directions projected onto one of the boxes.

All in all, [A Moment of Silence](#) made me think about life, art, and freedom of expression. It made me glad to be awake and able to experience plays like this.