

# Reviews

# The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

## Press quotes

“Odd, mad, surreal. Beauty and emotional honesty beneath its weirdness.”

--*Libby Purves, The Times*

“Wondrous and poignantly memorable in all sorts of unexpected ways.”

--*The Economist*

“Eclectic, inventive, pacy and exuberant.”

-- *The Business Times, Singapore*

“Murakami fans can celebrate. *Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is simply enthralling...a double WOOT.”

-- *Today Online, Singapore*

“Does a tremendous job of creating a genuinely theatrical experience from a complex work of literature... has the heightened intensity of something by David Lynch.”

--*Mark Fisher, Variety*

“A technically-stunning and dreamlike work of theatre; worlds of reality, fantasy and memory collide onstage to create something unforgettable.”

--*Edinburgh Spotlight*

“Earnhart has created something which at times feels like a new medium: blurring lines between theatre, art and film almost as effectively as Murakami’s tale of loss and identity mixes fantasy and reality.”

--*Edinburgh Spotlight*

“In Earnhart's hands, [the play] takes on a distinct David Lynch flavor -- with trippy, twisty, nightmarish images...Earnhart has certainly made Murakami's uneven, enigmatic novel his own -- no small feat.”

-- *The Business Times, Singapore*

“Your senses inhabit this bubble of a universe via elegant puppetry, video projections and a haunting score both live and recorded.”

-- *Today Online, Singapore*

“The visuals and the live sounds [are] delectable... you MUST absolutely watch it if you are a Murakami reader.”

-- *Hello Cotton, Singapore*

## The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle at the King's Theatre



Bora Yoon leads the fabulous soundscapes and music that run through this world premiere staging Robbie Jack

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**Libby Purves**

August 22 2011 12:01AM

A piece of theatre can be as odd, mad, surreal and episodic as it likes, provided it tells a story and makes you care. It can be alien, bilingual, semi-subtitled and cruel, provided it is beautiful. The director Stephen Earnhart's labour of love, a two-hour rendering of a long magical- realist novel by Haruki Murakami, is all of the above. One man near me kept sighing pointedly, but I happily rolled with it all the way. The Festival's eastern season has found a jewel: an asymmetric and strangely cut gem, but one which throws off beams of light.

New readers start here. Toru Okada, played with lovely decent naivety by James

Yaegashi, is jobless and stays at home folding laundry. His wife Kumiko has vanished, and so has his cat (called Noboru Wataya, after his rich, smug, fascist politician brother-in-law, though they dislike him and plan to change the cat's name to Mackerel). Toru lives half in mundane modern reality, half in a visionary dreamworld of huge symbols such as dark wells, huge suns and water, evoked by puppetry and shadows and marvellous projection on to the sliding papery walls of his life. Everything relates to the real dilemmas of heart and spirit: his disembodied voice says that the way to see reality clearly is "to get as far away from it as possible".

Characters speak partly in American-accented English, and half in surtitled Japanese. Toru encounters an unsolicited phone-sex caller, a bossy prostitute (Stacey Yen) whose soul was sucked out by the villain, and a freakish teenager obsessed with death. An old soldier who grows flowers at Hiroshima turns up and relates wartime atrocities, hard to take even in surtitles. Bursts of malicious Japanese TV prank-shows echo those unforgotten sadisms. Kumiko reappears, monochrome, projected on the fishtank after the politician's bodyguard has been surreptitiously eating the dried catfood. Fabulous soundscapes and music run through, composed and led (in a wild feather cockade) by Bora Yoon. At one point she plays *Auld Lang Syne*.

But Yaegashi's Toru is a modern Everyman to love, not least in his central fear that he does not truly know his wife because we all have too many "secret rooms" in us to connect properly. The plot finally makes sense, in a shamelessly airport-thriller way. That, and the beauty and emotional honesty beneath the weirdness, is why it works. The bird, by the way, is one whose cry sounds like clockwork. Toru imagines that its job is to wind up the spring of the universe.

Box office: 0131-473 2000, to Wed.

Supported by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation



## Theatre review: The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle



By Joyce McMillan  
Published: 22/8/2011



In a flat in modern Tokyo, a man is folding laundry, obsessively smoothing it into neat piles. There's no sense, though - as a thread of haunting song from live musician Bora Yoon launches New York-based director Stephen Earnhart and co-writer Greg Pierce's great new version of Haruki Murakami's acclaimed 1996 novel - that we're about to experience a story grounded in domestic naturalism.

For all around the hero's head, as he kneels by his laundry-basket, there swirls a world of images, dreams, ghosts and premonitions, brilliantly conjured up not only in Tom Lee's ravishing set of shifting screens haunted by shadows of inner landscapes, but also in Jane Shaw's magnificent sound design, which seems to whisper, echo and insist from every corner of the theatre.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle tells the story of an ordinary man of 30 or so, Toru Okada, whose wife has disappeared; and of his struggle for her soul against the forces around her brother Noboru, a violent, bullying media star with political ambitions who believes Japan should rediscover its machismo, its militaristic soul.

The story swirls unsettlingly with mingled strands of sex and violence, many of which lead back to Noboru; if the old soldier who comes to visit Toru represents the best of the old military tradition, Noboru represents the worst of it, repackaged for an age of pornography, prostitution, and sadistic reality television.

It's into this darkness that Kumiko has vanished; and for a short, rich, intense yet often dreamlike two hours, James Yaegashi's gentle, searching Toru tries to find her there. The colours of his inner journey are intense and breathtaking, the stage pictures unforgettable, the acting of Earnhart's fourteen-strong New York company precise, beautiful, and richly detailed.

The show that emerges - like the novel itself - is a work of art that speaks deeply and powerfully to the theme of this year's International Festival; in that it goes to the heart of recent Japanese experience, and finds there a pulse of lost, confused and dreaming humanity that is instantly recognisable to any one of us, living in a world both bounded made infinite by the big screens around us, in any modern city on earth.

• King's Theatre

## Legit Reviews

Posted: Tue., Aug. 23, 2011, 6:25pm PT

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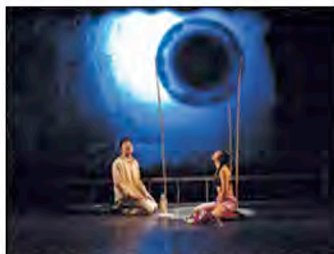
### The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

(King's Theater, Edinburgh; 1,350 seats; £30 \$49.44 top)

By MARK FISHER

An Edinburgh Intl. Festival presentation of a production by Wind-Up Prods., Rafael Fogel, Guy and Lia Haskin Fernald and Pamela Lubell, co-commissioned by the Asia Society and the Baryshnikov Arts Center, of a play in one act by Stephen Earnhart and Greg Pierce adapted from the novel by Haruki Murakami and directed by Stephen Earnhart. Movement and assistant direction, Karen Beaumont.

With: James Yaegashi, Akira Ito, Ai Kiyono, Yoshihisa Kuwayama, Mina Nishimura, Sophia Remolde, James Saito, Maureen Sebastian, Akira Takayama, Toshiji Takeshima, Fergus Walsh, Yoshihiro Watanabe, Stacey Yen, Bora Yoon.



Stephen Earnhart's "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle," performed in English and Japanese, draws from the 600-page novel by Haruki Murakami.

The first actor has yet to speak and already we've had bunraku-style puppetry, pre-recorded film, shadow projections, images on a TV monitor and live sound effects made by singing bowls and running water. In his adaptation of the 600-page novel by Haruki Murakami, Gotham helmer Stephen Earnhart hits us with an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink aesthetic that draws widely on his background in movies and theater. Performed in Japanese and English, this world preem occasionally threatens to obscure the simplicity of Murakami's writing with its multi-disciplinary whirl, but for the most part does a fine job of capturing the hallucinatory strangeness of the novel.

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For the former director of production for Miramax Films even to attempt to adapt the 1994 novel was a major undertaking. It's a book that takes its time as it unravels the story of the unemployed Toru Okada whose wife, Kumiko, has mysteriously disappeared. The event triggers the arrival of a succession of characters who are guarded about their esoteric knowledge and mystical powers, but reveal enough to suggest Toru's situation is somehow connected to Japan's military past and the rise to political power of Kumiko's brother Noboru Wataya. That Toru's absent cat is also called Noboru Wataya and he spends much of the novel at the bottom of a well is all part of the author's weird yet believable vision.

One of Earnhart's major achievements is that he does not disappoint fans of the book. Some major characters have gone, others have been merged into one and there are some minor variations in the plot. Yet he maintains the shape -- and, importantly, the atmosphere -- of the story in a two-hour production that is surprisingly unencumbered by a central character who is essentially passive.

As Toru, James Yaegashi is at the still center of a turbulent world -- and it is turbulent enough to keep the performance dynamic. For scenes at the bottom of the well, Earnhart switches to a puppet; for Toru's feverish dreams, he projects images of a hotel corridor on a series of moveable screens; for the battlefields of the Manchurian desert, he switches to storytelling mode. In the clash between the ordinary and the sinister, the production has the heightened intensity of something by David Lynch.

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## [S'pore Arts Fest 2012! Birds! Flocking good!](#)



by [Mayo Martin](#)

Published at 1:53 am, May 26, 2012

As you may have noticed, the festival has some sort of unofficial Bird Trilogy going on. There was the underwhelming *Flight Of The Jade Bird* and now, I finally caught the last two: the iPhone “play” *Songbird* and the stage adaptation of Haruki Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.

Here’s a word I haven’t used during my festival marathon so far. Woot. In fact, it’s a double woot.



Murakami fans can celebrate. I’m happy to report that *Wind-Up Bird* was simply enthralling.

To be perfectly honest, I had absolutely no expectations about this piece. In fact, when I first saw the

YouTube vid, I sort of dreaded the idea of watching it. It looked too, well, American.

And of course I had a lot of other nagging thoughts.

While it's not my favourite (I prefer his "Rat" books, which is perfectly coincidental, I should clarify), it *is* perhaps his most complex and, until *IQ84*, his longest. It's also his most epic, with sex, history, psychology, the supernatural/fantastical all thrown into the mix.

And actually, with the exception of the comparatively straightforward *Norwegian Wood*, I wondered how *any* of Murakami's stranger works could actually be staged—considering his main protagonists are usually slacker dudes undergoing mid-life crises, doing nothing but cook and basically sit there until weirdness comes knocking on their doors.

But, goddamnit, Stephen Earnheart and Greg Pierce actually pulled it off—transforming *Wind-Up Bird* into something watchable and even somewhat cinematic.

Murakami's books mostly inhabit that twilight zone between the banal and the strange. Here, the production sacrifices a bit of that dynamic and heightens the sensation of distinctly being immersed in the latter.

Househusband Toru Okada, who has been abandoned by both cat and wife, encounters some unusual characters one after the other: the precociously morbid Lolita teen teenager May, the psychic-with-the-colourful-hat Creta, Manchurian war vet Mamiya and Okada's sinister rightwing politician of a brother-in-law Noboru Wataya (played by the same guy who was Shredder in the old *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie!). He spends a lot of time inside a well and dreaming about sex, too.

The book meanders *a lot* (which is, I must add, what I love about the author's style.) But here, despite such a wide range of elements, everything is tightened up for one dark spectacle that's almost Lynchian. A wacky Japanese gameshow, a song-and-dance number somehow works within a story that also has elements of Japanese horror and touches on sexual deviance.

And while I had misgivings about the size of the venue (thinking the piece doesn't lend itself to something blockbuster-y and seems meant for a smaller, more intimate stage), after a while you simply forget that as your senses inhabit this bubble of a universe via elegant puppetry, video projections and a haunting score both live and recorded.

There's a scene where someone, in trying to explain the idea of empathy, pierces his arm with a metal rod. It looked real and I winced. That, he said, was empathy—feeling his pain without experiencing it physically.

*Wind-Up Bird* admittedly sacrificed a lot of the nuances in the novel, but when you leave the theatre feeling as exhausted and lost as the main character, empathising with someone whose life has practically been turned upside down with very little histrionics, I'd say bravo.



New theatre

## Dreams within dreams

### A haunting vision of Haruki Murakami's "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle"

Aug 27th 2011 | EDINBURGH | from the print edition

ADAPTING a novel for the stage requires courage, vision and a spirit that refuses to kowtow to the original author. But few novels can have been as hard to rework as "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle", Haruki Murakami's surreal and unwieldy 600-page exploration of fear. Stephen Earnhart's adaptation (written with Greg Pierce), seven years in the making, had its world premiere at the Edinburgh festival on August 21st. Like a dream, it is wondrous, incomprehensible and poignantly memorable in all sorts of unexpected ways.

First published in English in 1997, this Japanese novel was immediately hailed as a masterpiece, despite its fierce resistance to explanation. Mr Earnhart, a former producer for Miramax Films, has applied some cinematic flourishes to this production, which often recalls the bizarre cinema of David Lynch. The novel's hallucinatory world is evoked through film projections, puppets and music. The mood is haunting and confusing, and peppered with bewitching details, like a white bird that suddenly flutters from bedsheets and flies away.

In a suburban Japanese flat an out-of-work loser, Toru Okada (James Yaegashi), is folding laundry while he contemplates the disappearance of first his cat and then his wife, who hasn't been home for days. The doorbell rings. Visions of bubbling water and mist on stage signal the start of Okada's voyage of discovery. Various seemingly disconnected strangers come to visit, each one teaching Okada something new about himself. One leads him into the inky darkness of a well, where many of the novel's more philosophical soliloquies are set. "Sometimes the best way to think about reality is to get as far away from it as possible," he says.

Nothing is straightforward. As Okada, Mr Yaegashi is both fearful and open. His wife, Kumiko (Ai Kiyono), may have run off or she may have been kidnapped. Her beastly brother, performed by James Saito, epitomises Japan's right-wing romantics, who long for the days when warfare, chivalry and honour were prized above all else. An old soldier from Hiroshima visits



Curiouser and curiouser

Okada to tell him a terrifying story of a man who was skinned alive by enemy forces before the second world war. "Telling you my memories has given me so much relief," he says as he bids adieu.

If Mr Murakami's book was hard to follow, Mr Earnhart's version does little to clarify. Better to give yourself up to the theatrical experience of Okada's passage into the unknown. In a land of dreams, it is never the destination but the journey that counts most of all.

from the print edition | Books and Arts

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## Edinburgh Festival 2011: The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, King's Theatre, review

This adaptation of Haruki Murakami's novel, the Wind-up Bird Chronicle at the King's Theatre in Edinburgh is deeply felt and gracefully staged.

★★★★☆



The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle at the King's Theatre in Edinburgh Photo: Photo: Tom Kinkaid



By Sarah Crompton (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/sarahcrompton/>)

12:46PM BST 22 Aug 2011

554 followers



It's no great surprise that it has taken former film executive Stephen Earnhart seven years to bring this adaptation of Haruki Murakami's 600-page novel to the stage.

The book inhabits a haunting world, half-real and half-surreal, where dreams have the same weight as waking, and strange encounters are the norm. It's hard to think of anything more intractable for theatrical adaptation.

So it's to the enormous credit of Earnhart, that this production, given its world premiere at the Edinburgh International Festival, is such an absorbing piece of stagecraft.

Using puppets, projections, and sound – much of it performed live by Bora Yoon – it creates a fluidly inventive dreamscape through which its everyman hero Toru Okada (played with wide-eyed confusion by James Yaegashi) stumbles in search of his vanished wife Kumiko.

The images are stunning: the filmed projections of the hotel where something terrible happens; the tiny puppet who leaves her sleeping husband, followed by a white bird that flutters from the sheets; the disembodied face of Kumiko, flickering in black and white; her dress, which flies like a kite in her husband's memory.

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But just as impressive is the way in which the words weave their own spell, whether in English or surtitled Japanese, and whether describing people's empathy, the sensation of love, the violence of war or the unsettling darkness that lies beneath.

Inevitably, it isn't as complex as the novel, but it is deeply felt and gracefully staged.



# THE BUSINESS TIMES

PUBLISHED MAY 29, 2012

SINGAPORE ARTS FESTIVAL

## Murakami for the MTV generation

**The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle was dressed up with puppetry, video projections, flashy lighting and live soundscapes, reports HELMI YUSOF**



**The drama of the dreamscape:** A range of slick devices allowed the novel's fantasy elements and most crucial metaphors to come alive, blurring the line between reality and illusion as the story unfolds

JAPAN'S most celebrated novelist Haruki Murakami rarely deigns to have his stories adapted for another medium. So when an adaptation like this comes along, it was greeted by fans with equal doses of excitement and suspicion. "Really now, can his singular blend of realism, metaphors and dreamscapes be physically realised?" they asked sceptically. "Haven't the failed movie adaptations of Norwegian Wood (2011) and All God's Children Can Dance (2007) taught anyone anything?" Nervous jokes about Wind-Up Bird being a windy turkey popped up on literature lovers' Facebook pages last week.

Judging by the faces streaming out of the Esplanade Theatre on Saturday night, Stephen Earnhart's stage adaptation of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle hasn't completely satisfied its fans but it certainly didn't offend them either.

A top draw of Singapore Arts Festival 2012, the production was flawed but essentially faithful and well-imagined. It allowed the novel's fantasy elements and most crucial

metaphors to come alive through a range of slick devices - from modern puppetry to video projections to flashy lighting to live soundscapes. This is Murakami for the MTV generation: eclectic, inventive, pacy and exuberant.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle tells the story of an ordinary man named Toru Okada (James Yaegashi) who goes in search of his missing cat and wife. He meets several oddball characters including a prostitute of the mind, a death-obsessed teenager and a soldier struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.

As the story unfolds, the line between reality and illusion blurs. Toru finds solace at the bottom of a dry well, and in the arms of a stranger in a mysterious hotel room. At the same time, he discovers that his brother-in-law, the shady politician Noboru Wataya (James Saito), may have something to do with the disappearance of his wife.

Adaptor and director Stephen Earnhart was formerly a filmmaker - and the play's swift pacing, slick visuals and near wall-to-wall music are all hallmarks of film rather than dramatic theatre. A theatre director might have allowed only an actor's emotions and emotions to drive a monologue. But when Lieutenant Mamiya (Akira Takayama) is relating the horrors of war, Earnhart throws everything in but the kitchen sink, from video projection to sound effects to hyperkinetic lighting to accompany the monologue, as if he's afraid that the audience may nod off during a long

passage of uninterrupted speech. He should know better - Murakami fans have the stamina of Proust academics.

Indeed, the literary often becomes cinematic here. Murakami's novel has a pervasive sense of alienation, which seems to have drawn inspiration from Franz Kafka. But in Earnhart's hands, that quality takes on a distinct David Lynch flavour - with trippy, twisty, nightmarish images fit for a horror film.

Theatre purists may quibble with the bombardment of multimedia devices. But Earnhart has certainly made Murakami's uneven, enigmatic novel his own - no small feat.

## FESTIVAL REVIEW – The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle



Stephen Earnhart and Greg Pierce's adaptation of Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a technically-stunning and dreamlike work of theatre; where the worlds of reality, fantasy and memory collide onstage to create something unforgettable.

Toru Okada has lost his cat – and his wife. In his strange and portentous quest to recover both, he finds himself treading the paths of his own memory and dreams, as characters real and imagined accompany him on his journey. As the trail leads to his bullying politician brother-in-law, Toru pieces together the fragments to discover a terrible truth.

Using video projection, puppetry, mood-enhancing lighting and immersive, claustrophobic sound design, Earnhart has created something which at times feels like a new medium: blurring lines between theatre, art and film almost as effectively as Murakami's tale of loss and identity mixes fantasy and reality.

An accomplished thirteen-strong cast of mostly American Japanese create the multitude of characters in this complex and multilayered work: sharing roles as they portray gameshow hosts, lounge singers and ex-prisoners of war. Complementing the piece, a live soundtrack is provided by experimental musician Bora Yoon, herself resembling an exotic bird in black evening gown and feather headdress as she uses piano and electronic instruments to conjure up a suitably atmospheric score.

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is, at its core, an examination of how our lives connect: either through long-held relationships or via chance encounters. And, like these connections, Earnhart and Pierce's stunning adaptation lingers in the mind long after we return from its creative vision into the

reality of our own lives.

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle runs until Aug 24 at the King's Theatre*



August 22, 2011 3:56 pm

## The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, King's Theatre, Edinburgh

By Ian Shuttleworth



Strange days: James Saito and Toshiji Takeshima in 'The Wind-Up B

**H**aruki Murakami's work is often seen in international literary circles as the quintessence of contemporary Japan. This adaptation of his 1995 novel (published in English in 1997) certainly seems to sit squarely within that field of consciousness. Murakami's story, with its Japanese take on magic realism, mixes precocious schoolgirls and demagogue politicians with a prostitute with spiritual powers and a motif of entrapment down a well echoing through the past and present; similarly, this staging blends live action, *bunraku* puppetry and a number of video styles in an aesthetic that constantly rubs the classical and the modern up against each other.

What may be surprising is that the production's creative driver is not Japanese but American. Film-maker and former Miramax director of production Stephen Earnhart approached the project as he had done a number of his documentary films, by

long-term immersion, living for a year or so in Japan in order to grasp the perspective(s) of the book and its everyman protagonist Toru Okada.

As Toru searches for his missing cat and his missing wife he encounters a bizarre TV game show, dream police, a veteran of the war in Manchuria and, on all sides, dark forces seemingly under the control of his sinister politico brother-in-law.

Earnhart's script condensation (with Greg Pearce) of Murakami's 600-page novel has the episodic feel of a screen work, but as director he finds a style of dissolving between scenes with deft use of lighting and multimedia split focus.

Bora Yoon, in a bullpen at the front of the stalls, provides live music and soundscapes ranging from synthesiser to tuned bowls and water pouring into and out of a (tenanted) fishtank. In mood, looks and feel, the production, in Japanese and English, articulates that collective Japanese sense of surfing the breaking Hokusai wave of the future.

A caveat, however: anyone of more than average height will find two uninterrupted hours in the constrictive seating of the King's Theatre to be an agonising experience. More than one of the walkouts around me were visibly or audibly due not to dissatisfaction with the presentation but to overpowering cramp; had I not been on duty, I would have been among them.

★★★★☆

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## The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle ....

- **Source:** The List ([Issue 687](#))
- **Date:** 24 August 2011
- **Written by:** [Claire Sawers](#)

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Photography | Tom Kinkaid

**Haruki Marukami's novel is given multimedia stage adaptation by Stephen Earnhart**



Toru Okada is 29 and shares an apartment with his wife, Kumiko and their cat. When both the wife and cat vanish and don't come back for several days, Toru tries to work out what's happened to them, with the help of a spiritualist who doubles as a prostitute. As Toru looks for his wife, the lines blur between his reality – newly unemployed, he passes his sleepless nights folding laundry and watching weird game shows on TV – and a dreamworld where memories and fears swirl around him.

[Haruki Marukami](#)'s original novel fused the details of Toru's domestic life; filling up the cat's food bowl, cooking spaghetti while listening to the radio, with surreal, imagined landscapes. The multimedia stage [adaptation by Stephen Earnhart](#) is the result of over seven years of planning, and is a fitting and impressive translation from the written word to the stage, staying true to Marukami's otherworldly vision of a slightly melted suburbia.

Japanese [bunraku](#) puppets serenely act out some of the dream sequences, giant screens lead us down David Lynchian hotel corridors in slow motion, and a fish-tank doubles as a glowing panel for occasional subtitles. (The dialogue is delivered in a mix of American-English, or Japanese with English supertitles.) Despite the potentially very hectic plot, which flips between past and present, zigzagging between World War Two torture flashbacks, and grinning dancing girls, the pace remains steady, never losing the audience, even as Toru descends deeper into the murky underworld of his mind.

At times, the characters seem to skate over the surface of the play, rather than burrowing beneath its layers. So while Toru Okado (James Yaegashi), his brother-in-law Noburu Wataya (James Saita) and the spiritualist Creta Kano (Stacey Yen) are central characters, their presence feels fleeting, and overshadowed slightly by the powerful visual effects and stage tricks. But rather than detracting from the production's appeal, it just places the emphasis on the visualisation of a mental world, rather than a more in-depth character exploration.

Two particularly successful aspects of the stage show are firstly its 'sensual' quality – something Earnhart was keen to convey, to make it less of a story and more of an 'experience'. This is helped by onstage water features, and a gently sublime live soundtrack by sound artist [Bora Yoon](#). Dressed in black bird feathers, she floats on and off stage, playing chimes, prayer bowls, glockenspiels and steel drums.

Secondly is its tender treatment of one of Harukami's central themes in the book, the distances that can be felt between two people. 'Is it possible,' he asks in the second chapter, 'for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another?' While Toru lies next to his wife, he describes the feeling of 'standing in the entrance of something big ... a world that belonged to Kumiko alone ... a big, dark room, I was standing there, holding a cigarette lighter, its tiny flame showing me only the smallest part of the room.'

As his wife removes herself, both emotionally and physically from their relationship, Toru struggles as he tries to grasp something shadowy and elusive from her. Earnhart has captured that same ethereal thing from Marukami's novel; welding together his abstract, existential thoughts with a physical landscape – in this case a pixellated, wooden jointed and feather-boia wrapped one.



# Hello Cotton



## About



I'm Shahidah Diah, a 22 year old Singaporean. I am an art student as well as a teacher in training.

Welcome to Fayra's Reveries, a blog in which I wish to share my everyday lifestyle, covering from beauty, fashion to book and music reviews. I don't proclaim myself to be anything like a fashion guru or a critique, but simply, another girl with her own opinions about the world she lives in :) Visit my art portfolio:  
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## Singapore Arts Festival 2012: The Wind-up Bird Chronicle Review



Being a Murakami fan, I jumped into the chance into buying tickets to watch the staged production of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle straightaway. For months I had been waiting for the day to come, and as the day finally came it felt surreal. My mind was full of questions and the first one was "How would Stephen Earnhart adapt this novel within two hours without losing the story's complicated allegorical essence and meaning?". As I thought about it, I came up with two hypotheses; that some characters have to go. Or that, some metaphors have to go. I love all the characters but I could not help it but to think that he might have given up the May Kasahara, Ushikawa.. or, Nutmeg and Cinnamon. These characters are crucial in the revelation of the story, but the story (no matter how painful it is for me to think it that way) could be bent. And yet, the story won't lose its point.

I guess, the most difficult task was not to lose the vision of that point in the far horizon of the story in which it centralizes on the broken relationship between Toru Okada, an ex-lawyer who quits his job, and his wife, Kumiko Wataya, a designer. Kumiko left their house one day and never came back. Instead, she seeks for her brother, Noboru Wataya, a self-possessed man and an upcoming politician. Toru finds this strange because Kumiko told Toru about her warped childhood memories of Noboru and her late sister, who had committed suicide. Toru came to believe that Kumiko was held against her will by Noboru and dismisses the letters that "Kumiko" wrote to agree to their divorce.

At the same time, strange things started to happen to Toru when there was a mysterious woman who calls him to engage in phone sex, the presence of spiritual sisters Creta Kano and Malta Kano (which leads to the hotel room dream), the death of Corporal Honda and the stories by Lieutenant Mamiya (which led to the metaphor of the well and water), and May Kasahara (the discovery of the well). The disappearance of Creta and Malta Kano led to two more new characters, Nutmeg and Cinnamon, a rich mother-and-son-pair who come to the aid of Toru, in return for which Toru works for them in spiritual realms.

This story is the journey of a man who had always been caught up with the repetitious cycle of life like any other modern working adults now, and later to find himself caught up in a labyrinth of spider webs.. or a maze of life, in which he must know what he wants and what he do not, and to try to comprehend the link between reality and the unreal. Does something that happened in dreams not affect the reality? How could you be so sure that these are two separate realms?



So I was right that they have to let go of a character(s). Some fans of the book might be a little disappointed with the production because of this but I really felt that it cannot be helped if you were to squeeze everything into two hours. It was true to what it claimed to be “a sensual and cinematic theatrical experience”. The visuals (the use of puppetry, shadow-play, and video projections) and the live sounds was delectable. I was most gripped by the chilling tale of Lieutenant Mamiya and was relieved by the comical Prank Show Host scene although my hate for Noboru from the novel seeps through me. I was almost disappointed to see that Toru s character who did not fought back against Noboru s threats. Toru was not how I imagined the portrayal of his character would be. I always felt that he is a strong character than what he seems.

I think I can never finish describing how I feel about the production in relation to the book, but I what I would advise is that, you MUST absolutely watch it if you are a Murakami reader, or even if you aren t, you MUST watch it in order to experience a different theatrical experience, a notion of “Theatre of Dreams” and “living cinema”.



# Features



## **MEDIA CLIPPING**

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**Headline:** Wind Up Bird Chronicle

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**Date:** 25 May 2012



**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**  
WSJ.com

May 24, 2012, 7:02 AM HKT

## Staging 'Wind-Up Bird Chronicle' in Asia



National Arts Council

A Singapore staging of Haruki Murakami's 'The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle' aims to capture the book's dreamlike nature.

Stephen Earnhart first discovered Haruki Murakami's "Sputnik Sweetheart" back in 2003, reading it in one sitting while in Laos. He had never heard of the Japanese novelist, but as he continued backpacking through Southeast Asia, people he met kept passing him Murakami

books.

His love affair with Mr. Murakami's surrealist fiction developed quickly, and over the course of the year he polished off seven more of his books.

But almost a decade later, the one he remains most familiar with is "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle," in which the central character, Toru Okada, embarks on an unusual journey as he struggles with the disappearance of his cat and the collapse of his marriage.

### More In Haruki Murakami

[Murakami, Ghosh Make Early List for Literary Prize](#)

Mr. Murakami's words inspired Mr. Earnhart, a theater director, to realize them on stage. On Friday, his adaptation of "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle" opens as part of the Singapore Arts



[Could Murakami Finally Win the Nobel?](#)

[Murakami: Is a New Volume of '1Q84' in the Works?](#)

[Asia's Most Notable Films of 2010](#)

[The Long Journey of 'Norwegian Wood'](#)

Festival, after premiering at the Edinburgh International Festival last year.

Mr. Earnhart's "Wind-Up Bird Chronicle" incorporates video, puppetry and other nontraditional elements, an attempt to match what he sees as the original work's dreamlike nature. "I

wanted to create on stage how I felt when I was reading Murakami," Mr. Earnhart said. He added, however, that Mr. Murakami warned against trying to please him. Mr. Murakami's agents did not respond to a request for comment.

According to Mr. Earnhart, Mr. Murakami was "incredibly generous and easygoing," and they bonded over their shared love of David Lynch, the American filmmaker behind "Mulholland Drive" and "Blue Velvet."

Singapore is a fitting site for Mr. Earnhart's production. "When I was in Southeast Asia, his books became an extension of my subconscious. I was feeling like an alien and an outsider," he said. "We have really brought home the play."

*"The Wind Up Bird Chronicle" runs Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. at the Esplanade Theatres in Singapore.*

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# THE BUSINESS TIMES

PUBLISHED MAY 18, 2012

## ARTS

### From text to stage

BY RACHEL AU-YONG



HARUKI Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* makes a leap from text to stage, thanks to film director Stephen Earnhart.

But first, the latter had to get the notoriously elusive author's approval.

So he took a gamble in 2004 and flew to Japan, where the author lives. Murakami, who promised Earnhart 15 minutes to deliver his pitch, ended up talking for hours.

"Our mutual love for David Lynch was a real point of connection," says Earnhart, referring to the surrealist filmmaker of *Eraserhead* and *Mulholland Drive*.

*Wind-Up Bird* (above) weaves several narratives together, and takes place "in a very David Lynchian world," where the characters suddenly find themselves in a darker world underneath the placid, serene suburbia.

A man loses his cat, his job and his wife, and embarks on a quest to find the meaning of life. Along the way, he meets a teenager fixated on death, a traumatised survivor of the Manchurian war, a prostitute of the mind and other dark characters.

"The collision between gritty realism and dreamy, sometimes nightmarish, surrealism appealed to me," says Earnhart. "I could visualise how to bring that to life on stage."

The work combines puppetry, water play, film, live music, dance and acting. It is staged in two languages, English and Japanese. Sound engineers were brought on-board to "craft super-specific aural environments." All this makes *Wind-Up Bird* hard to classify in the theatre world, but Earnhart has his own suggestion.

"The best phrase to describe the aesthetic I set out to create is a 'theatre of dreams'," he says. But it hadn't always been thought of in that way.

One of the biggest challenges was whittling the 600-page tome down to a two-hour production.

Over the next seven years, Earnhart and his writing partner Greg Pierce developed the show in New York, Costa Rica and Tokyo. One of the hardest decisions was cutting out the use of holographic imagery that helped create a "lush visual world."

"I miss it sometimes, but what I gained technically from this device, I gave up exponentially in human emotion," explains Earnhart.

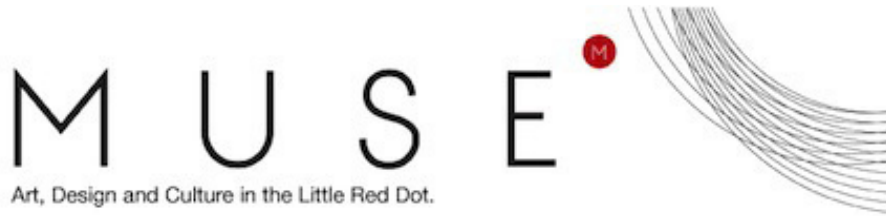
Now the weight falls upon the shoulders of the actors, especially the bilingual Japanese-American James Yaegashi, who plays the lead Toru. British journalists may have picked on his leaden performance at the Edinburgh Festival last year, but Earnhart is pleased with his "extremely talented" cast.

Not that any criticism is going to hurt box office sales here - tickets are fast selling out.

Despite the number of people in the audience, you can count on Murakami not being among them. He will never watch it, as he worries that seeing adaptations would influence his writing.

"[Murakami] told me, 'This is yours, take anything you want from it. Don't show me drafts. I don't want you to feel that you need to please me,'" Earnhart says.

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle. May 25, 8pm, May 26, 3pm and 8pm. There will be a post-show dialogue on the 25th. Esplanade Theatre. Tickets \$20 - \$110 from Sistic. Contains mature content - recommended for those above 16*



## Murakami's Theatre of Dreams

Posted: May 14th, 2012 • Filled under: [Dance](#) [Film](#) [Literary](#) [Theatre](#)

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

*25-26 May 2012*

*Esplanade Theatre*

Murakami fans will be thrilled as the first theatrical staging of a Murakami novel graces our shores as part of the Singapore Arts Festival 2012. *Wind Up Bird Chronicle* tells the story of unemployed Toru Okada who loses both his cat and wife. His struggles to cope with their disappearances bring him on an eccentric adventure involving a fantasy-line worker, an overbearing prostitute, a death-obsessed teen, a war veteran and a sadistic politician.



This is the first novel Murakami ever gave permission to be adapted, and the privilege of staging *Wind Up Bird Chronicle* fell onto the lap of film-director Stephen Earnhart. And Stephen Earnhart is a man with a vision. Despite his expertise in film, Earnhart was inspired to stage *Wind Up Bird Chronicle* in the theatre. “It didn’t feel like film alone would do the book justice. It needed the full range of tools of a three-dimensional medium to properly create the multi-layered Murakami worlds”, says Earnhart.

While film and theatre are two genres that are drastically different, Earnhart saw the potential of synergizing his experience in film together with the impermanence of theatre. Earnhart’s experience of reading the novel was almost visceral, as he saw clearly how he could use video, sound, light, shadow and water to create the different layers of Murakami’s narrative.

“I was interested in creating a sensual, experiential theatrical experience that was more than just a play. I knew a novel of this complexity could never be translated appropriately solely in the medium of just film or just theater. It needed these different elements to do the novel justice”, he tells Muse.



It was a project seven years in the making. Not surprising, given Earnhart’s vision for a technologically serviced theatre of dreams. The painful task of transposing Murakami’s 600-page novel into a manageable script was the primary reason for the long developmental process. On top of that, there was the enormous task of imaging the aesthetic of Murakami’s hallucinatory world.



Expect an element of puppetry, which will blur the lines between prosaic realism and magical surrealism. Puppet director Tom Lee, who is interested in combining the worlds of puppetry and technology, approached Earnhart for a part in the project, and Earnhart never looked back.

At the core of Earnhart's production is a shrewd synergy of technical elements and classical theatre technique to create a dream-like reality. Sound designers Jane Shaw and Bora Yoon worked together with Earnhart in the pre-production stages to craft specific soundscapes that deploy non-traditional musical instruments such as water, zippers, radio static, bicycle bells, bowed metal, emergency sirens and various other gadgets.



This technology supplements, but will never replace, good performance in theatre. Movement director Karen Beaumont worked with the actors to devise a consilient physical repertoire, blending the work of Le Coq, Grotowsky, mask and clown techniques. Wind Up Bird Chronicle was born a three-dimensional and cross-cultural collaborative piece, co-created by a group of writers, designers, actors, dramaturge and movement directors.



Fans amongst us will know that Murakami's narratives may not be linear nor traditional, but Earnhart maintains that Murakami's writing is accessible. "He writes for the guy on the subway, not the literary elite."

So the end of the day, it was this principle of writing for the man on the street that propelled the staging of *Wind Up Bird Chronicle*. Earnhart believes that the production, too, has to be accessible and universal. "I wanted to make something unique and unorthodox, but not so conceptual that people couldn't follow it. I wanted to take people on an emotional journey rooted in a story."

*TEXT BY HUIZHAN APRILENE GOH*

*IMAGES COURTESY OF Wind-Up Productions LLC*



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姫路文学館で伝統工芸展  
札幌にリクエスト可能パン店  
鎌倉で「小さい」革小物展  
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- 宮 城
- 仙台経済新聞
- 宮 城
- 石巻経済新聞
- 秋 田
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- 水戸経済新聞
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- 船橋経済新聞
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【インタビュー】 2012-06-03

【Singapore Arts Festival2012】  
村上春樹著「ねじまき鳥クロニクル」を翻案  
演出家・映像作家スティーヴン・アーンハートさん

ツイート

1

いいね！

2

0

チェック

Bl

「Singapore Arts Festival 2012」で5月25、26日に「ねじまき鳥クロニクル」を上演した、演出家で映像作家のスティーヴン・アーンハートさん。作家の村上春樹さんによる同名の小説を翻案し、2時間というコンパクトな作品に仕上げた。マルチメディアを駆使して創り上げた幻想的な空間と、生身の役者による演技の組み合わせによって生まれる舞台は、「Living Cinema」、「three dimensional cinema（三次元シネマ）」「a theatre of dreams（夢の演劇）」と呼ばれる。その独特の手法が紡ぎ出した新しい「ねじまき鳥クロニクル」の物語は、シンガポールの観客を異世界の冒険に引きこんだ。同作品で表現したかったことや、ご自身の創作の概念などについて、スティーヴン・アーンハートさんに伺った。



なぜ「ねじまき鳥クロニクル」を取り上げたのですか？

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タイガービール、工場見学ツアーをリニューアル…  
シンガポール航空傘下の格安航空会社「スクート」…  
シンガポール・ボτανック・ガーデンで無料野外オ…  
シンガポールで恒例「ビアフェスト」ー3万200…

ヘッドラインニュース一覧

シンガポールで活躍する日本人  
ブロガーグループ「Ninja Girls」  
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る。今回出演する番組「Food  
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[拡大写真]

フォトフラッシュ一覧

マリーナベイ・～（これに続く正答はどれ？）

☒ マリーナベイ・三途

☐ マリーナベイ・SaaS

☐ マリーナベイ・ざんす。

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星で活動する日本人ブロガーグループ「Ninja …
星・国内最大規模の「ユニクロ」がオープンー開店…
シンガポール航空傘下の格安航空会社「スクート」が…

- 東京 アキバ経済新聞
- 東京 神田経済新聞
- 東京 日本橋経済新聞
- 東京 銀座経済新聞
- 東京 新橋経済新聞
- 東京 品川経済新聞
- 東京 東京ベイ 経済新聞
- 東京 池袋経済新聞
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- 東京 西多摩経済新聞
- 東京 町田経済新聞
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- 東京 二子玉川経済新聞
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- 京都 烏丸経済新聞
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- 大阪 京橋経済新聞
- 大阪 なんば経済新聞
- 大阪 あべの経済新聞
- 兵庫 神戸経済新聞
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僕が選んだというよりは、作品の方からやって来たんですよ。2003年に東南アジアを長期間旅行したときに、旅先で出会って一緒に旅した友人から村上さんの本をもらった。村上作品を読み始めたのはそれが最初。でも、その後、どこへ行ってもたくさんの人から村上さんの本をもらい続けることになって。結局、もらい物の村上さんの作品は8作品もあります（笑）。あんなに簡潔な文章なのに、読者を別世界へと連れてゆくことができるところが素晴らしく、僕はすぐに惹きこまれた。村上さんの作品のなかでも「ねじまき鳥クロニクル」は、最も魅力的な作品だと思っています。「ねじまき鳥」は、僕が今やっているような「Living Cinema」「三次元シネマ」の手法に最も強いインスピレーションを与えてくれる作品です。だから、村上さんの作品を読んでいるときに感じるような、イマジネーションの世界に連れて行かれるようなドラマチックな体験を舞台上で繰り広げたいと思いました。

村上さんに会いにいったとき、僕たちには「デビッド・リンチの映画ファン」という共通点があるとわかりました。もちろん村上さんの作品がすべてとは言わないけれども、村上さんの作品に出てくる奇妙な世界や驚異的な登場人物たちは、僕にデビッド・リンチの映画を連想させることがあります。村上さんは僕の舞台化の計画については「原作のことは忘れて、好きなように上演していいよ」とだけ言ってくれました。

どのようにして、三部作からなる長編小説を2時間の作品にできたのでしょうか？

役者が加わって稽古をはじめめるまでには、約2年かかりました。できるだけシンプルなお話になるまで煮詰めてゆき、翻案を始めてから6年後の今、2時間という形になっています。ノモンハン事件や旧日本軍など政治的な問題については、上演化の過程で村上さんが引用した本などを読み研究したけれど、僕は日本人ではないから、作品で描かれている歴史を完璧に理解することはできないと考えました。そしてもっと普遍的なものにフォーカスすることにしました。

登場人物は皆、体や心に傷を抱えている人たちだけれども、それぞれに共鳴・協力しあいながら少しずつ回復してゆく。間宮中尉のモノローグで、私たちがもっている唯一の共通点は「痛み」という意味のことが語られるけれども、これは僕が一番好きな部分ですね。村上作品の常として、不条理で恐ろしくて、しかも物議をかもしようなことが語られる長い語りだけれども、ここの物語は一気に読んでしまいました。

この物語は、死んだように生きていた主人公のトオルが、様々な人々との出会いや苦しみを経験した後に、自分の力で立ち上がっていきこうとする過程です。米国がベトナムのことについて語りたがらないように、満州は日本が多くのことを語りたがらない問題ですが、そのことはトオルの立場にとっても近いように思います。妻が自分以外の男と関係を持ったことや、今まで考えないようにしてきた自分と妻との性生活など、辛い出来事や現実にある日突然直視しなければならなくなります。人が語りたがらないことや不吉なこと、人が抱える闇というのも人間の一部分です。悲しみや渴望が愛の一部であるように、闇があるからこそ喜びも存在している。僕は、人間のそういう矛盾に興味があります。だから僕はデビッド・リンチの映画が好きなのかな（笑）

ニュートンのビストロ&バー「スカイプ」、屋外デッ…
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演出には日本語、人形、マルチメディア・・・さまざまな表現手段が駆使されていますね。

トオルとクミコの会話など、親しい役柄同士で交わされる会話は日本語で話されています。また、間宮中尉の回想や独白も、日本語です。

人形を使う演出は、ワークショップに参加したパペットデザイナーが、パペットとテクノロジーを融合させてみたいというアイデアを持っていて実現したものです。彼は、日本で文楽の勉強などをして準備してきました。人形は、例えばトオルが見ている夢の中などで、彼自身となる「アバター」を演じる役目を担っています。

僕たちの舞台では、ホログラムのプロジェクターを7つ使うなど、テクノロジーを駆使した巨大な背景などを使うので、人間の存在が小さくなってしまいがちでした。ですが、テクノロジーに頼らず、人間だけでも物語を進行できるくらいの演技力を目標にしていたので、言葉を使わなくても役者同士で抽象的なコミュニケーションとる即興や、舞踏ダンサー・山崎コータさんのワークショップなどを経験したりして役者の演技力を高め、最後には、いいバランスを見つけることができました。実は、ニューヨーク公演の最終日、後半に機材が壊れるというハプニングがあったんです。でも、観客は全然気がつきませんでした。もちろん僕は焦って気が気でなかったんですけど（笑）、それと同時に「成功した！」と確信しましたよ。



ご自身にとって演劇とは。

大学卒業後、僕は「ミラマックス・シネマ」で映像の世界に携わり、映画や映像作品を20年間にわたって製作してきました。演劇に関わり始めたのは約8年前。演劇は、期待していたよりもずっとおもしろい。演劇は、僕にとって、映画、ライブパフォーマンス、音楽、ビデオプロジェクション——自分が好きなものを全て盛り込んだ創作ができる場所なのです。僕は自分のスタイルのことを「three dimensional cinema（3次元シネマ）」と呼んでいます。

僕の演劇作品ではたくさんのメディアを使うので、ひとつの作品に仕上げていくのはとても骨の折れる仕事です。無数の指示を出し、形にしていだけでも大変だった。演劇に関わることへの手応えを感じたのは、「ねじまき鳥クロニクル」をエディンバラ演劇祭で上演したとき（2011年）。まだ完成だとは思えなかったけれども、最後には、自分がどう創っていきたいのかが明確になっていました。

このような過程があったからこそ、今回のシンガポールの公演はとても楽しいです。役者に集中することができ、とても嬉しく感じています。人間が本来持っている創造性は本当に素晴らしくて、毎日新しい発見がある。映像は、編集作業の繰り返しによって、自分が思ったとおりに断片をつなぎ合わせて作り上げていくもの。でも、演劇は人生と同じで、全てをコントロールすることは不可能。全く異なるからこそ、両方のメディアに関わるのが楽しいんです。いつか日本でも、演劇作品を上演してみたいですね。

スティーヴン・アーンハートさん

ニューヨーク大学卒業後、米の映画会社「ミラマックス・フィルム」で映画・映像作品のプロデューサーとして活躍。ミュージックビデオやドキュメンタリー映画も手がけ、映像の世界で約20年間にわたりマルチな才能を発揮してきた。約8年前から演劇創作を開始。プロジェクトベースで、得意の映像を生かした作品を生み出している。

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### The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle: A flight of fancy

By Susan Mansfield

Published: 20/8/2011

**After he read the book, Stephen Earnhart knew The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle was the new direction that he had been seeking, writes Susan Mansfield**

A LABOUR of love or a fool's errand: for a long time Stephen Earnhart was unsure which The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle would turn out to be. His adaptation of Haruki Murakami's novel, an ambitious fusion of cinema and theatre which premieres this week at the Edinburgh International Festival, has been seven years in the making. Sometimes, he still wonders if it's been worth it.

"There have been so many times when I have woken up in the middle of the night and thought: 'What am I doing?' " says Earnhart, a film and theatre director based in New York, who is a former director of production at Miramax. "I couldn't have picked a more complex project. I would stop and think: where is this thing going? Is anybody ever going to see it? All of my life, and this commitment of money and time - why?"

The project had its genesis in South-east Asia in 2003, where Earnhart went travelling after finishing his last movie, an acclaimed documentary called Mule Skinner Blues, which followed a group of friends from a trailer park in Florida as they realised their dream to make a 15-minute horror film.

"I was really burned out. I didn't know what I wanted to do, whether I wanted to forget living in New York and just go and have an easier life somewhere, forget all of the hassle of the creative life and all of the anxiety that comes with it. I'd never even heard of Murakami, but when I was travelling, people kept handing me these books. I read eight of them back to back."

Even though he wasn't looking for another project, something about the books - and The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle in particular - caught his imagination. "There was something about Murakami's style which really appealed to me, but it also reawakened a desire to create this synthesis of cinema and live performance which I was really interested in when I first got out of film school. I knew I didn't want to just go make another film, I wanted to do something that I hadn't done before, something that was ambitious and bold." He grins, wryly. "Be careful what you wish for."

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is the story of a man, Toru Okada, whose wife goes missing, and the quest which propels him through a world which is both real and surreal. The bizarre characters he encounters, each with their own story, bring him face-to-face with the darker side of Japan's past, and with the darkness within himself. Earnhart says: "There was something about it which felt like a film wouldn't be enough and a performance on a stage wouldn't be enough, that required the movement between worlds."

Having been both an actor and a director, in films and in the theatre, he could bring together his experience of both worlds. But before he could begin to work out a theatrical language for The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, he had to get the author's permission. Murakami, who is Japan's most widely read author and a nominee for the Nobel Prize for Literature, does not readily grant such requests. It took him four years to agree to the recent film adaptation of Norwegian Wood, by French-Vietnamese director, Tran Anh Hung.

"I took a huge risk. I wrote him a simple letter saying, 'I will fly to Japan if you will give me 15 minutes of your time. I have this crazy idea, but I think instinctively it's something you'd really love.' He agreed to give me 15 minutes and I flew to Japan and laid it all on the line. Actually, he was so nice he gave me most of the day. A few months later, he agreed."

They discovered they shared a love of the films of David Lynch. "That was a real point of connection. The story of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle happens in a very David Lynchian world, where the characters suddenly find themselves in a darker world underneath the very placid, serene suburbia. That collision between a very gritty realism and a very dreamy and sometimes nightmarish surrealism appealed to me, and I could visualise how to bring that to life on stage."



Murakami gave him creative carte-blanche and encouraged him to make the show in New York, not in Japan. "He wrote the book in America, he was intrigued by how somebody from America would take this novel. But despite him saying, 'Do whatever you want', I still felt obligated to be really truthful. I had to get to a point where I felt comfortable saying 'I'm going to put the book over there and make my own choices'."

Earnhart spent 11 months living in Japan, shooting film footage and getting to know the culture. "In a very Murakami way, it felt deceptively familiar; the faces looked different, but I felt I could be walking down 14th Street. And then you turn the corner and suddenly all the sound drops out, it's dead quiet, and there's one old guy sweeping out his porch with a broom that looks about 700 years old, and you think, 'OK, I'm in Japan'.

"There's something about Japan that is so filled with duality, more than any other place I've been. There's such a tension between the outer face and the inner world, the masks people wear, and I think that so much of what Murakami's writing about is this duality."

When Earnhart and co-writer Greg Pierce had honed a version of a script, it was time to work out how to combine the theatre and film elements. "The thing I wanted to start with more than anything was a solid story. I wanted the different elements to support the story. When we did our first workshop, I thought it was going to have seven projectors and a holographic screen. We did all that, but in the end the actors just got lost. It looked amazing, but it was cold."

It was after that workshop that designer and puppet master Tom Lee approached Earnhart with a few ideas. This led to a three-week workshop in Japan with puppets, Japanese actors and no technology whatsoever. "For me, that's where the project really took form. I'd never worked with puppets before, and the puppetry that Tom was bringing was so mesmerising it became a kind of bridge between the live performance and the multimedia."

The team tried various ways of combining the puppetry, acting and film before hitting on the right balance. "We had an amazing experience one night during a workshop performance: in the second half of our show, we lost all video. I freaked out. The video designer was crawling around the floor chasing cables. Actors were coming on stage trying to remember lines that were spoken only on film. It was one of the most tense nights of my life.

"There were a lot of important people in the room and I kept thinking, 'What am I going to say at the end of this?' But a friend leaned over and said 'Don't say a word - nobody knows!' It was one of the worst, horrifying nights of my life, but it proved the point. We spent all that time on the story, and that's what pulled people along."

The show immediately appealed to EIF director Jonathan Mills, who wanted to programme a festival which explored the meeting points between East and West. As a Japanese novel, written in the United States, directed by an American and performed in English with a cast of Japanese and American actors, it fitted the bill perfectly.

When Earnhart arrived in Edinburgh for the first time, in March, he realised that his seven-year marathon was approaching its conclusion. "Murakami writes a lot about running marathons, he talks about the mentality of that and how closely that is linked to the stamina it takes to write novels. I would add to that: creating multi-media theatre based on those novels.

"It may sound cheesy, but it wasn't until I got off the plane in Edinburgh that I finally understood why I had been working on this for so long."

- The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is at the Kings Theatre tonight until 24 August.





## The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle Neil Cooper

© [The Herald](#)

When American film and theatre director Stephen Earnhart met Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami with a view to adapting Murakami's 1995 novel, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, for a multi-media stage production, the deal was sealed over a mutual love of David Lynch. Six years later, and Lynch's influence on the world premiere of Earnhart's interpretation of Murakami's 600-page epic at the Edinburgh International Festival this weekend may not be obvious, but it remains telling that the artist who bonded the two men is an American. Because the book's spare, understated prose is more akin to something by Raymond Chandler or Raymond Carver, both in the way Chandler made great literature out of genre fiction, and in the way Carver took the meat and two veg of everyday mundanity and imbued them with an ambiguous significance.

Telling the increasingly fantastical story of one Toru Okada, whose loss of his cat initiates a series of encounters with strangers that leads him slowly to confront some very painful truths, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is as far away from Western notions of Japanese literature as one can get. Hip, urban and contemporary, it is also fused with a woozy strangeness that offsets the story's initial realism. It was this very singular sensibility that first attracted Earnhart to what has become a very personal quest of his own.

"What attracted me to the story," Earnhart says, "was an opportunity to be able to bring everything I love about cinema and everything I loved as an actor about live performance under the one umbrella, and to be able to take the audience on a journey to these worlds that Murakami has so beautifully given us already. So it's a collision between a deceptively mundane realism and something that's incredibly surreal and captivating, and which to me felt much more like memory and the sub-conscious in a world where anything can happen.

"That sort of collision is something I've been interested in with my film work, so here was a place to do that. People kept giving me these books by Murakami, who was an author I wasn't familiar with when I took my first trip to south-east Asia. So I read eight of these stories back to back while I was travelling, and I was tired and half-asleep sometimes when I was reading these books. Going on that journey in an alien culture, I already felt like I was in another world, so reading these books and dreaming about these characters affected me on a sub-conscious level.

“I’d taken this trip to try to remember what it was I was even living for in my creative life. I was really burnt out, and I hadn’t gone to try to accomplish anything, but this journey that was supposed to be for two months in 2003 suddenly turned into this 10-month walkabout.

That completely intertwined with reading these books, so somehow it felt like something was pulling me towards this material, and I just got really excited about creating something again when I was really burnt out.”

That was when Earnhart made the initial approach to Murakami, who, once he’d given the green light, preferred to stay in the background. For Earnhart, whose internship at Harvey Weinstein’s Miramax production company after film school led to him becoming director of productions, such a free rein was a blessing.

Earnhart had previously worked on TV comedy show Saturday Night Live and went on to produce films including Madonna: Truth or Dare and A Rage in Harlem. Earnhart later worked as an actor as well as a sound designer, and directed the documentary film Mule Skinner Blues.

Such a background begs the question of why Earnhart simply didn’t opt to make a full-blown movie instead of a stage show, especially in light of the recent big-screen adaptation of another Murakami novel, Norwegian Wood.

“I wanted a challenge,” Earnhart says, “and wanted to do something that wasn’t just on a flat screen.

Halfway through the process I went to Murakami and suggested we make it as a film, and he rejected it, so that closed that door in a good way. But it was important the project was rooted in narrative and not be too experimental.

“I see a lot of multi-media things in New York, and I don’t even know what they mean, but they’re beautiful sometimes. It’s on a par with going to a modern art museum and looking at squiggly lines. I wanted to make something that, even if you took all these things away, you still have a great story. We live our lives telling each other stories, and the book feels so simple. Murakami doesn’t write for the literary elite. He writes for the guy on the subway.

“That’s the kind of aesthetic I want to bring on to the stage.

“There’s a very human story there, and I could relate to this character in the way that I lived next door to a woman for six years before I realised I didn’t know her at all. We’re just scratching the surface of each other. I can never jump into your mind and know what you’re thinking, so that question of how well we know each other, I think about a lot. The content was very personal for me, yet from a professional point of view it just reawakened some desire that I had when I first left film school to make a cinematic form of theatre.”

Given what has clearly become a labour of love for Earnhart, then, what is it exactly that lies at the heart of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle?

“To me I think it’s about loss,” Earnhart says. “This project has meant different things to me at different stages, and I’m not the same person I was six years ago. But having recently lost my mother, that element of loss and the range of emotions you go through when you lose somebody really important, whether it’s a break-up or an actual death, to me is really important. When the foundation of your world crumbles, when you lose a parent or a wife or whatever, for me that journey is really relevant and really accessible to people.

“The catharsis of that journey for me is what does it take, what does this man have to learn and what does he have to go through in order to be able to move on?

“I think he’s clinging to the past, and he doesn’t want to look at all these terrible things that he’s been avoiding for years. We all have a capacity for violence, and we all have a capacity to go to the dark side and go off the



deep end, just as Toru Okada does in the story.

“We all have those sides of ourselves, so to acknowledge them rather than hide from them is the only way we can move on, acknowledge who we are and be fully formed people. So to watch him struggle with that like we all struggle, and be able to confront those parts of ourselves, to confront what it’s like to lose somebody and to be OK with that, and to be OK with another person in another relationship, all those things are possible.

“Yes, people might leave me or have the capacity to have affairs, but to be able to rise above that and still have the courage to be in a relationship and still love somebody, that’s what I think this story is about. To have the courage to still try.”