

Theater review: 'The Angel & the Woodcutter'

Robert Hurwitt, Chronicle Theater Critic

Saturday, May 23, 2009



The Angel & the Woodcutter:

Movement drama. Created and directed by Park Chung-euy. (Through today. Cho-In Theatre of South Korea, presented by San Francisco International Arts Festival at Cowell Theater, Fort Mason, San Francisco. 80 minutes. Tickets: \$20-\$25.)

Love blossoms in a hut in the woods. A rustic family dinner becomes a game of hot potato, while a man's wife and mother comically battle for household control. Then the soldiers arrive. With the swift, sharp strokes of masterful physical performance, the broad comedy of a rural folktale turns into a potent, even shocking look at the soul-wrenching inhumanity of war.

In its first American appearance, South Korea's Cho-In Theatre opened the theater portion of this year's San Francisco International Arts Festival on Thursday at the Cowell Theater with its widely traveled "The Angel & the Woodcutter." Because of cutbacks in the festival's city funding, Cho-In's funny and eloquent anti-war piece (co-presented by the Korean Cultural Center of San Francisco) will have only one more showing, today at 6:30 p.m. It's well worth getting out to Fort Mason to see, not only as a rare opportunity to sample Korean drama but for the quality of the work.

No knowledge of Korean is required. "Angel" creator and director Park Chung-euy founded Cho-In seven years ago to experiment with making theater without words. The eloquence of his radically reconstituted folktale is expressed beyond language barriers through the masterful physical acting and puppetry of the three lead actors.

Park's "Angel" follows the folk version at first. A Woodcutter (Kim Gitae) and his Mother (Son Kyoung Soon) see an Angel (Lee Sang Hee) bathing in the woods. In one of several lovely bits of shadow puppetry, Mother steals the Angel's robe, without which she can't return to heaven, and brings her home to become the Woodcutter's wife.

But there are telling variations. Park introduces an unsettling bit of violence to interrupt the sweet but broadly commedia-like bond between Kim's boundlessly energetic Woodcutter and the improbably bent Son, whose face may be the most expressive mask ever created. Lee's struggle



against captivity injects another serious note, soon diminished in her beautifully expressed awe at falling in love and the comic acuity of her conflict with Son and her burgeoning pregnancy.

War intrudes to take the Woodcutter into service as Beethoven's Fifth shatters the pastoral flute and chimes of the early scenes. Park's use of music is sometimes counterproductive, to Western ears at least. The increasingly mawkish orchestral score pushes at our emotions with all the subtlety of a televangelist.

It isn't necessary. The acting and Park's stagings are more than eloquent enough as the abandoned Son and Lee descend into the world of warfare, refugee camps, a startling, horrific rape, prostitution and more. Even in its truncated form, the 2009 festival has brought us a memorable gift in Cho-In's artistry. And there's more to come.

San Francisco International Arts Festival presents a variety of theater, dance, music and film events at various locations through May 31. For tickets or a full schedule, call (800) 838-3006 or go to <http://www.sfiarf.org/>.

E-mail Robert Hurwitt at rhurwitt@sfnchronicle.com.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/23/DD5H17O5N7.DTL>

This article appeared on page **E - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)