

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

A Gazebo in Search of Itself

Sylvie · Wednesday, September 4th, 2019

There's what happened, and what we remember. There's what we remember and the story we tell.

—Hannah and the Dread Gazebo

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A sneaky little comedy is playing at The Fountain Theatre these days. It's called *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo* and it is quite different from anything else you may have seen lately. Part of it is in Korean, but don't worry if you don't speak Korean. Putting it another way, the exchanges in Korean don't change anything.

Will you understand the comedy without them? Yes and no. Because this play zigs and zags and then zigzags again and again. It's all in an effort to explain itself and seemingly having a lot of fun doing it, but with such countless tangents and distractions along the way, it sort of forgets where it's going.



l-t, Hahn Cho, Gavin Lee & Monica Hong in *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo* at The Fountain Theatre.

Hannah and the Dread Gazebo also is different not just because it is presented in association with East West Players (another worthy Los Angeles company) or because it is written by Jiehae Park and is breathlessly directed by Jennifer Chang, but because it seems perpetually on the verge of making a point without quite making it.

So there is this Korean-American (or American-Korean?) family, see? Like many families, it has a mother (Janet Song), a father (Hahn Cho), a son Dang (Gavin Lee) and a daughter Hannah (Monica Hong). Hannah, the youngest, is about to become a “board-certified pediatric neurologist” after a cool 28 years of schooling, starting in kindergarten.

The oldest member of this family is Grandma. She lives in Seoul, South Korea, and although no one seems to be quite sure about this, she apparently decided to commit suicide by jumping off the 63rd floor of the Senior Living quarters where she lived, on the south side of the Demilitarized Zone. Before doing it, however, she announced her intention to do so in a note that included a gift of a wish and a small jar with an even smaller stone in it. The wish and the stone, we're told, have been in the family for years.



l-r, July Lee & Monica Hong in *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo* at The Fountain Theatre.

These characters are an engaging group of individuals, smart, fun and wacky, all of which are good things in a comedy. I would tell you more if I could, but the trouble with this *Gazebo* is that it's muddled. Too many tangents go off in too many directions. Just like life.

There is Mother's desire for the gazebo of the title, which is being given away free, but is a hard thing to fit into an apartment. There is Hannah's boyfriend from Argentina (who's on the phone but never appears). There is musician brother Dang's band, which seems to be on some permanent hiatus, and there is this inquisitive girl (Wonjung Kim) who insistently befriends him... and on and on and on it goes. There also are the landmines in the Demilitarized Zone, magic garlic and dive-bombing magpies, with snippets of otherworldly metatheatre or magic realism or any of the current phrases that go just so far in explaining... not enough.

These pixilated asides don't lend themselves easily to story-telling. They're flash cards of emotions and impressions and overall originality. Credit the cast for work that is solid, energetic and appealing. The most impressive within it is our suicidal Grandma, played by the vivacious July Lee, a theatrical jane-of-all-trades who absolutely shines, not only as Grandma, but also in several minor roles—as a dry cleaner, government official, nurse, receptionist, etc., all of which she injects with engaging vitality.



Monica Hong as Hannah in *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo* at The Fountain Theatre.

If the play aims high, and it does, it also gets seriously tangled up in its own ambition. It is too dense, cute and clever for its own good. Eventually it loses its way in a kind of soup of spirited moments, with humor, fables and stories all in search of a resolution—a *dénouement*, to quote Hannah—that it doesn't quite reach.

In its giddy and distracted hour and 40 or so minutes, *Dread Gazebo* might want to consider slowing down, long enough to perhaps clarify things a bit. Or is the message, in the end, simply that we are all puzzled, eager, curious and befuddled immigrants in the world, who came to this planet from some unknown place, with an unknown path forward and an even more obscure destination about which we know even less...

If so... Next!

Top image: l-r, Wonjung Kim & Gavin Lee in Hannah and the Dread Gazebo at The Fountain Theatre.

Photos by Jenny Graham

WHAT: *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo*

WHERE: The Fountain Theatre, 5060 Fountain Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90029.

WHEN: Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 2 & 8pm; Sundays, 2pm; Mondays, 8pm. Ends Sept. 22.

HOW: Tickets, \$25-\$45, available at www.FountainTheatre.com or 323.663.1525. Premium \$45,

regular \$40. Seniors (65+), \$35; Students (w/ID), \$25; Mondays, \$40 and pay-what-you-want, subject to availability.

PARKING: Adjacent secure lot, \$5. Also some street parking.

RUNNING TIME: One hour, 40 minutes. No intermission.

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