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The Tale of Haruk

Both kids and adults will enjoy this old Korean myth about the boy who couldn't stop eating, says **Bryan Richard**.



It's been almost ten years since Bae Yo Sup first wrote and directed *The Tale of Haruk*, a play about a boy with an unstoppable hunger. But the appetite for his group Tuida's award-winning play continues to grow.

Drawn from a traditional Korean story that has been passed down orally through several generations, *The Tale of Haruk* tells of an old couple who were the world's only inhabitants. With only each other for company, they were struck by a crushing loneliness and prayed for a child. The Spirit of the Tree heard them and gave them a boy child named Haruk, but forbade them from ever feeding him cooked rice. All was well for the

happy trinity, with the boy growing fast under their loving watch. But one day, he begged to try the one thing that had been kept from him, and the elderly couple were so doting that denying any of the boy's wishes became impossible.

No sooner had he polished off a serving of cooked rice than Haruk began to experience a desperate and implacable hunger. The more he ate, the hungrier he became. With nothing left to consume in the house, he set off into the world and ate his way through everything on the planet, growing bigger all the time. With all of the world in his belly, still famished and now lonely, the boy returned home. When the old couple realized there was nothing else he could eat, they take a step of supreme and unconditional love.

"It's a very simple story, but there's something deep inside it that exerts a certain fascinating power over the imagination of those who hear and see it," said Yo Sup. And both children and adults have walked away enthralled by Haruk's story as it is brought to life by Yo Sup's strange and dream-like theatricality that features traditional Korean paper puppets, native masks, percussive music and phantasmal light design. "Of course, some kids get a little scared, but there's an edgy point and counterpoint between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the existence of both darkness and light, that makes the show so much more touching in the end," he said.

While *The Tale of Haruk* expressly derives its aesthetic sensibilities from the Korean Bucheong Lion Dance and Mask Drama traditions, Yo Sup and Tuida, actively aim to create theatre that combines the acting conventions of Eastern and Western clowns and boldly experiments with nature-friendly materials and improvisatory techniques.

"Tuida is always in search of an open theatre," summed up Yo Sup of their philosophy. "I always hope the audience can make a new discovery at one of our shows."

Source : [Time Out Bengaluru](#)

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Review: The Tale Of Haruk

Posted on Jul 28th, 2010 by Shuchi in Reviews, TUIDA

Never before have I seen Ranga Shankara so full, so agog with chatter. People sat on the steps, children (who made up a large share of the audience) took great persuasion from their guardians to settle down, groups that sat separated talked excitedly with each other across the aisles.

With that kind of anticipation and turnout, began *The Tale Of Haruk*.



The Tale Of Haruk is a Korean play aimed at children. Performed by TUIDA, the play is in Korean. Subtitles in English were displayed on screens on either side of the stage. Not that many subtitles were needed: the play does not have many dialogues. Of what is there, a lot of it is made up of the single word – “haruk”.

Unlike the conventional children's offering high on colour and sound, *The Tale Of Haruk* is understated and quiet. No yellow balloons, red spangles or green jokers' costumes; we have here instead an all-white stage and an all-white attire. Making a success of minimalism in a children's play requires vision and guts, and TUIDA shows them amply. The stark environment helps to heighten one's appreciation of sights and sounds. Multi-coloured scarves and jackets stands out against the white, the chomping of rice and the crunching of grass resonate in the silence.

The sparse set and costumes, we soon discover, are not as simple as they seem and take us by surprise several times.

TUIDA brings in percussion, shadow play, puppetry and mime into the act. A sense of the unexpected runs throughout as we do not know what form we'll see next. There are a couple of show-stopping moments that were greeted with loud gasps, as when The Spirit Of The Tree appears the first time and when the giants walk in.

In a nice bit of symmetry, the human characters and the puppets switch forms as the play progresses. Haruk, a hand puppet to start with, grows to monster size while his parents, played by live actors at first, are reduced to pull-string puppets and shadows at the close. It's worth admiring how closely the puppets resembled the live people. A lot of care has clearly gone into the details in this play, right down to having the Spirit Of The Tree talk in a “spirit-like” font on the sub-titles.

Most children's stories have a “moral” attached to them. This moral is usually the most distasteful part of the story. I remember reading *Aesop's Fables* as a child and wondering why the fables could not have been told without a lesson forced down the throat. *The Tale Of Haruk* gives credit to children's intelligence by not handing out neatly pared lessons. If there is something to be learnt, it has to be thought over and drawn out.

The message for parents is, in fact, more direct. Haruk's parents exemplify unconditional love. Haruk is not an ordinary child. He has special food needs and “linguistic tendencies” – his vocabulary is confined to a single word. He complains about his meals, muses on the gloomy night and philosophizes about his existence, all using that one word: haruk. But unlike Peter Bichsel's *A Table Is A Table* in which a man who does something similar is branded mad by everyone, Haruk's parents not just understand his tongue but even pick it up for themselves. There is also a lesson, perhaps, in the consequences of giving in to the obstinate demands of a child.

I am not easily amused by mime but I must confess I was today, and I have my neighbours in the hall to thank for that. An actor had to but twitch an eyebrow and the group of extremely enthusiastic six-year olds next to me would burst into peals of giggles. Who can remain straight-faced when surrounded by infectious laughter? Not me! I was also intrigued by how engaged they were with the zoo visit sequence. When the actors imitated an animal they would jump to identify it. The play had included pauses before the animals' names were given out – a smart touch.

This is a play for children but it's a delightful watch for adults as well, gently prodding your sense of wonder and leaving you thinking of “worlds within worlds”.

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Article by Shuchi

Shuchi lives in Bangalore, adores theatre and hangs out a lot at the Ranga Shankara cafe.

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Deepa Jettlage

DEEPA MOHAN, 26 JUL 2016

"Tale of Hanuk"....enjoyable evening for children at Rangas Shankara

It is very easy to review a play which has had a house-full audience, which was cheered to the echo, and was obviously enjoyed to the hilt by every child in the audience!

"Tale of Hanuk", a Korean fairy tale, staged by TUDA, a Korean performance group (that aims to be nature-friendly in play-making) was brought to the Bangalore children by way of Rangas Shankara's Jaiel initiative to provide theatre for children, supported by Botanius.

The production used puppetry, some amount of sleight of hand, a set of musical instruments that are recycled from items of ordinary use and a talented cast of eight members, who take on multiple roles through the course of the play.



The tale deals with an old couple, who, after more than fifty years of prayer to the Spirit of the Tree (who engaged in the husband's reading the same newspaper, and the wife's knitting and unravelling the same clothes) are blessed with a baby, Hanuk...



The process being that the baby (with a toad-like face and prodigious eyes) he fed only dew...



However, soon Hanuk asks for rice and finally his parents give in...



and he rapidly grows larger and stronger...



soon he has eaten everything...



and the parents, in an act of unconditional love, offer themselves as food... and find that within Hanuk's insides, life goes on as usual!



The small bits of magic and the dialogues (which were in Korean, with subtitles on screens on either side of the stage) had the children roaring with glee from the very beginning, and the production is just word lavish and very satisfying. However, it was apparent that Hanuk's appearance and the sudden spurts of growth seemed to be scaring some of the children in the audience! "It's so scary!" were words I heard often, piped in childish tones, above the music.

In spite of this, though the ending had everyone cheering, and the various special effects were much appreciated...and they were very well executed, indeed. The cast were given a standing ovation at the end, and they, too, made a dramatic exit at the end!

All in all, a delightful evening for the children who, as Aru said, were lucky enough to come for the show (how I wish there had been another show of this Korean performance group!)

DEEPA MOHAN

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