

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

How We Let the Light Get In

Sylvie · Wednesday, October 16th, 2019

Going to the theatre can be an act of faith, a search for meaning or simply a search for entertainment. It's unusual to come across a play that satisfies all three in a production that refuses to leave you long after you've left it — the most nourishing of possible outcomes.

You will find it at Pasadena's Boston Court for another ten days (it closes October 27). *How the Light Gets In* is a study in inward emotions. You may read into that whatever you wish. This intimate piece is written with a few well-chosen words by E. M. Lewis and directed by Emilie Pascale Beck just as quintessentially as it is written. That is its triumph.



Ryun Yu & Chelsea Kurtz in *How the Light Gets In* at Pasadena's Boston Court.

Its star — if one is needed — is scenic designer Tesshi Nakagawa, who has created an exquisite setting of platforms painted in sleek patterns of light and dark brown lines, either parallel or circular, with discreet background panels that change color as the moods change. It is dominated by an imposing large and leafless tree. The place is a Japanese garden, where Grace (Amy Sloan), a travel writer who never travels, spends time as a docent, and where Haruki Sakamoto (Ryun Yu), a widowed architect of some renown is trying — and failing — to come up with a simple design for a new tea house. These two are destined for each other even if they don't know it. Yet.

The play's other inhabitants are Kat (Chelsea Kurtz), a runaway who has taken refuge in this garden's beauty and where she is discovered and befriended by Grace. Kat will return the favor later in unplanned and unexpected ways. A tattoo artist who goes by the name of Tommy Z (Dieterich Gray) is Kat's other some time friend. He helped her once, when she needed it most, by tattooing over the multiple attempted-suicide scars on the inside of her wrists. Tommy Z is also the play's de facto narrator — the wild, wise man, bridging gaps and philosophizing from wherever he happens to be.

These lives intertwine in ways none of them could have imagined. If the lack of a more elaborate context feels a little frustrating, you may thank me for it after (and if) you see the play, which offers the uncommon pleasure of being discovered gradually. As you can probably tell by now, it is a piece that makes some demands on your receptivity and your frame of mind as well as your attention.



l-r, Amy Sloan & Chelsea Kurtz in *How the Light Gets In* at Pasadena's Boston Court.

There are several references in the script to haikus, those carefully structured Japanese one-verse poems, small cogent jewels of wisdom, humor, revelation or enigma. Everything about the structure of this play emulates a haiku, including the title (borrowed from Leonard Cohen: “There’s a crack in everything; that’s how the light gets in”). With great economy of words, everything spoken here is a reaching out from a shy, ascetic darkness that grips each of these four people, toward the light of more peaceful, open and joyous encounters.

The premise of this thoughtful and embracing work lies in examining the relative distance we all share with everyone else. Grace discovers Kat; Kat was once “saved” by Tommy Z.; Haruki discovers and is awakened by Grace. And so on. The events in their lives, like gravitating vines searching for the sun, are reaching for the clarifying love that, in ways large and small, can brighten their reality with the singular capacity to alter it. Simple premise, deeply felt.



Dieterich Gray & Amy Sloan in *How the Light Gets In* at Pasadena’s Boston Court.

Aside from Nakagawa’s enchanting spare setting, bathed in warm lighting by Sarah Resch, the actors seem carefully handpicked for their roles, each revealing just the right amount about themselves while leaving some floating mystery behind. In the end, it is the sensitivity of the whole enterprise that draws us in, degree by enlightening degree. And the effect lingers long after we experience it, providing, as I was saying, the most nourishing of possible outcomes.

Top image: Ryun Yu & Amy Sloan in How the Light Gets In at Pasadena’s Boston Court.

Photos by Craig Schwartz.

WHAT: *How the Light Gets In*

WHERE: Boston Court, 70 No. Mentor Ave., Pasadena, CA 91106.

WHEN: Thursdays-Saturdays, 8pm; Sundays, 2pm. Ends October 27.

HOW: Tickets \$20-\$39 available at BostonCourtPasadena.org or by phone at 626.683.6801.

PARKING: Free, behind the theatre.

RUNNING TIME: 90 minutes, no intermission.

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