

HO KA KEI (JEFF HO)'S

COCK ROACH



September 13 - October 9, 2022

Mainspace

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Please Note: Titles highlighted in red may be of particular interest to educators.

About the Play

Synopsis

A cockroach smoking catnip. A bard lamenting over immortality. A boy stuck in a sticky situation. Three splinters caught in a collision of language, longing, and lobsters (who sometimes burst, and who sometimes burp).

From Toronto Theatre Critics award-winning playwright Ho Ka Kei (Jeff Ho), *Cockroach* is a coming-of-age play about the stories we tell ourselves to comfort, to survive, to resist, to overcome, and to be.

Cast and Crew



Karl Ang
as
"The Bard"



Anton Ling
as
"The Boy"



郝邦宇 Steven Hao
as
"Cockroach"

Written by Ho Ka Kei (Jeff Ho)

Directed by Mike Payette

Associate Direction by Damon Bradley Jang

Choreography by Hanna Kiel

Production Dramaturgy by Myekah Payne

Set and Costume Design by Christine Ting-Huan Urquhart

Lighting Design by Arun Srinivasan

Sound Design by Deanna H. Choi

Assistant Sound Design by River Cecil Oliveira

Stage Management by Emilie Aubin

Apprentice Stage Management by Jaimee Q. Vicente-Hall

About the Playwright

Jeff Ho is a Toronto-based theatre artist, originally from Hong Kong. As a playwright, his works includes the critically acclaimed *Iphigenia and the Furies (On Taurian Land)*, produced by Saga Collectif; *Antigone: 方*, produced by Young People's Theatre; and *trace*, produced by Factory Theatre and the National Arts Centre. His work has been developed by the Stratford Festival, Tarragon Theatre, Young People's Theatre, Human Cargo, Factory Theatre, Cahoots, the Banff Playwrights Lab, and Nightswimming Theatre. His plays are published by Playwrights Canada Press.

Jeff is the Company Dramaturg with Outside The March. Jeff is grateful to have been honoured with a Toronto Theatre Critics Award for Best New Canadian Play (*Iphigenia*); the Jon Kaplan Legacy Fund Award for a Young Canadian Playwright; the Bulmash Siegel Playwriting Award (Tarragon Theatre); nominated for four Dora Awards, and a Harold Award (*House of Nadia Ross*). He is a graduate of the National Theatre School.

Playwright's note

cockroach began as a wholly different play entirely. Stemming from Repercussion Theatre's Words with Will commission in 2018, I had initially set out to consider how Shakespeare in translation (in a multitude of languages) might sound musically. I was fascinated by all the learning around language as music. It was an external, research heavy, and humbling process. During one fateful workshop day, dramaturges Emma Tibaldo, Amanda Kellock, Jessica Carmichael, and the wonderful cast of intercultural performers so wisely nudged me to look inward, to hone in on that specificity of lived experience, and to consider the relationship between Shakespeare with my mother tongue, Cantonese.

Something cracked open, and I clumsily finger flubbed my way through a long ass text message that became *cockroach*. Development paused until 2020 where it was nudged onward by the mighty Mike Payette, Myekah Payne, Richard Rose, and Joanna Falck and the fabulous team at the Tarragon Theatre.

Writing this piece that's so dear, tender, and often sad for me, took immense love, faith, and support from so many folks and generous artists beyond Repercussion and the Tarragon: Erika Batdorf, Monica Dottor, Daniella Vinitzky Mooney, Madeleine Martin, Brian Quirt, Jonathan Seinen, Augusto Bitter, Kyle Orzech, Maurice Dean Wint, Richard Lee, Jeff Yung, Justin Eddy, Deena Aziz, Li Li, Kathlean Maclean, Tsholo Khalema, Alexandre Lavigne, Winluck Wong, and the love of my life, Pierre Poussin. This play would not have been possible without these beautiful humans, and I am forever grateful to them.

And, I am grateful for you, dear audiences. Thank you for being with us at the theatre.

Director's note

The ways in which we navigate life's unexpected moments are quite remarkable, aren't they? Not unlike the past years of global reckoning; the tectonic shifts that have called for us to look within ourselves and each other more deeply and carefully in order to learn more about ourselves and each other. All to say humans are pretty resilient and surprising beings...as are cockroaches. We survive in this world with all of our lived experiences from the celebratory to the regrettable; from the striving to succeed to crashing defeat; from our days of innocence to the realization of our loss of it. These extremes exist synchronously within us, and with Jeff's "Boy" who, after a single moment, will question their entire being; questioning their belonging and their understanding of home, their relationship to a language learned and forgotten, and their ability to endure or succumb. It is a complex negotiated journey, and with no definable path, it is also one we can all understand when faced with a tremendous internal struggle. What this instigating moment reveals for the Boy is a splintering of identities that have shaped him to this point, bringing forth a heightened examination of how those fractions guide him through the unimaginable. Sometimes we simply need to be reminded of what we have in order to redeem what was lost.

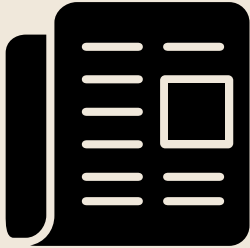
There has been a lot of love, intensity, discovery and laughter in the realization of Jeff's rich text and deeply personal story. I am thankful for Jeff's trust and the immense talent, heart and curiosity this creative team has offered in exploring Cockroach's breadth in the rehearsal room, on the stage and behind the scenes. A special shout out to Karl, Steven, Anton, Em, Jaimee and Damon who are equally luminescent and courageous, and to Hanna Kiel who has been an incredible collaborative force; supporting the piece in a grounded physical world that honours the scope of this tale.

Thank you for being with us and for championing new work as we re-establish ourselves together in this moment in time surrounded by the wide backdrop of our challenging world. As we seek to empower our own voices and those around us, it is a privilege to share this story with you.

Bon spectacle,

Mike

'Cockroach' and the 2019 Hong Kong protests



1

 Click here

'Dogs' vs. 'Cockroaches'

On Hong Kong streets, insults take a dangerous turn.

2

Umbrellas Down

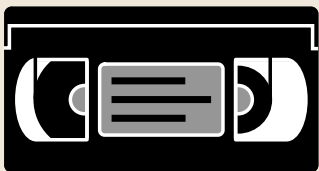
Stories from the front lines of the 2019 Hong Kong protests and the 2020 Chinese National Security Laws that ended Hong Kong's independence.



3

Cockroach by Ai Weiwei

Filmed during the height of the protests, this documentary captures the extraordinary intensity of an unprecedented era in Hong Kong's history.



4

Hong Kong's Cultural Fireman

Kacey Wong, an award-winning artist and activist, speaks about art as resistance on the *Creating Artistic Resilience: Voices of Asia* podcast.



What's So Special About Cockroaches?

1



Why are cockroaches so hard to kill?

This TED-Ed animated short digs into the genetic wonders of this tenacious creature.

2

Cockroach Facts

Learn about about these fascinating creatures with these creepy cockroach facts.



3

Natural Histories: Cockroach

The BBC explores how the cockroach has influenced society, satire and tourism.



4

How to Milk a Cockroach

Have you considered cockroach milk?



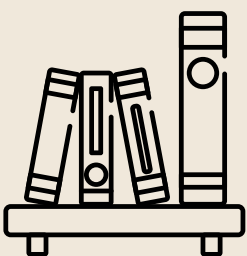
5

Cockroaches:

Ecology, Behavior, and Natural History

As mentioned in *Cockroach*:

William Bell's cockroach research.



Dissociative Identity Disorder & Male Sexual Assault

NOTE: This section discusses sexual assault, trauma and mental illness

1



Dissociative Identity Disorder

Symptoms, causes and general information about *DID* from the Cleveland Clinic.

2

Moon Knight: Inside Marc Spector's Mind

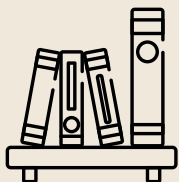
Meet the Marvel superhero with a rare real-life mental disorder.



3

Complex Trauma: Dissociation, Fragmentation, and Self-Understanding

A medically reviewed article from PsychCentral outlining key concepts from Dr. Janina Fisher's book *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors*.



Check out the book discussed in this article here!



4

Reimagining Masculinity

Landon Wilcock shares his journey as a male sexual assault survivor in this TEDxQueensU talk.



Shakespeare, Hong Kong, and East Asian Theatre

1



Shakespeare Unlimited: Shakespeare in Hong Kong

Learn about role of Shakespeare in the British colonization of Hong Kong.

2

Asian Adaptations of Shakespeare Today

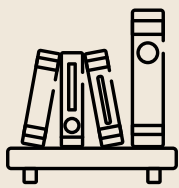
An intro to works by East Asian directors, the new meanings embodied by Asian actors, and the hybridization of Asian and Western cultures.



3

Shakespeare Alive: Shakespeare and East Asia

Author Alexa Alice Joubin talks about her fascinating research and new book, *Shakespeare and East Asia*.



Read the prologue to the book here!

4

Foreign Asia/Foreign Shakespeare: Dissenting Notes on New Asian Interculturality, Postcoloniality, and Recolonization

This essay is an attempt to decolonize two monolithic entities - Asia and Shakespeare.



Telling Stories Through Dance

1



Working in Theatre: Choreographer

Choreographer Maria Torres shares her experience of working in theatre, understanding story, and challenging herself to step outside the box.

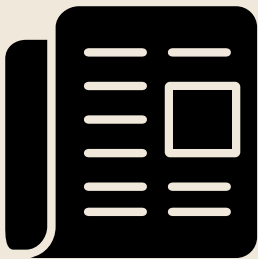
2

1-on-1 with Hanna Keil (BUT THEN AGAIN)

Cockroach choreographer Hanna Keil speaks about her practice as a storyteller and the effects of the pandemic on live performance.



3



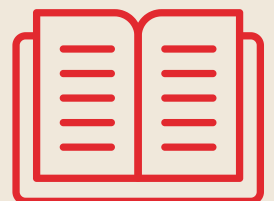
The Art of Telling a Story Through Choreography

Emily Kline and Melissa Turka of *em dance collective* share tips on storytelling through movement.

4

The Autoethnographic Act of Choreography

What stories are held within our bodies? This academic article considers the creative process of storytelling, the dancing body, and Verbatim Theatre methods.



Conversation Starters

Pre-Show

Consider the concept of *intrusion* in different contexts; personally, artistically, politically, psychologically.

Consider the emotional toll of being considered an intruder and of feeling intruded upon.

Conversation Starters

Post Show

How did the use of movement and choreography effect your understanding of the characters and their experiences?

Consider the quote "One country two systems. One boy two voices"

What do you think THE BARD and COCKROACH represent?