

Edinburgh International Festival Review: The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (***)

☒ 'Confusing' was the word I heard most often as the audience was leaving the King's Theatre after Sunday's performance of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. And I'd have to agree with the description.

Which is ironic, because the novel by cult Japanese writer Haruki Murakami, on which the play is based, is gloriously clear in its writing – there's little doubt as to the events taking place, even if the book's themes, or what it all means, remain elusive. Jobless Toru Okada has lost his wife and his cat, and after setting out on a search for both, encounters a strange teenager, a military veteran with a shocking tale to tell, a powerful, sinister politician, a prostitute of the mind, and a deep, forbidding well.

Stephen Earnhart's stage adaptation has been seven years in the making, and it is a feast of theatrical effects: video projections on everything from the whole stage to a small fish tank, puppetry, live music, dance, striking lighting, even Japanese game shows. It's like a combination of David Lynch, Robert Wilson and Robert Lepage, and nothing if not spectacular.

But amid the visual trickery, the simple necessities of storytelling and of engaging with the audience have been lost. We flounder when attempting to piece events together, and we feel little sympathy for (or interest in) the characters on stage.

Which is a great shame, because there are some excellent performances here, and some beautiful touches to the staging. But if more dramatic weight had been placed on narrative

clarity and emotional impact, it could have been a truly meaningful show.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, King's Theatre, until 24 August