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Ripe Time's 'Sleep' Awakens at the Annenberg Center

Murakami's short story comes to life with an emotive, dreamlike theater performance.

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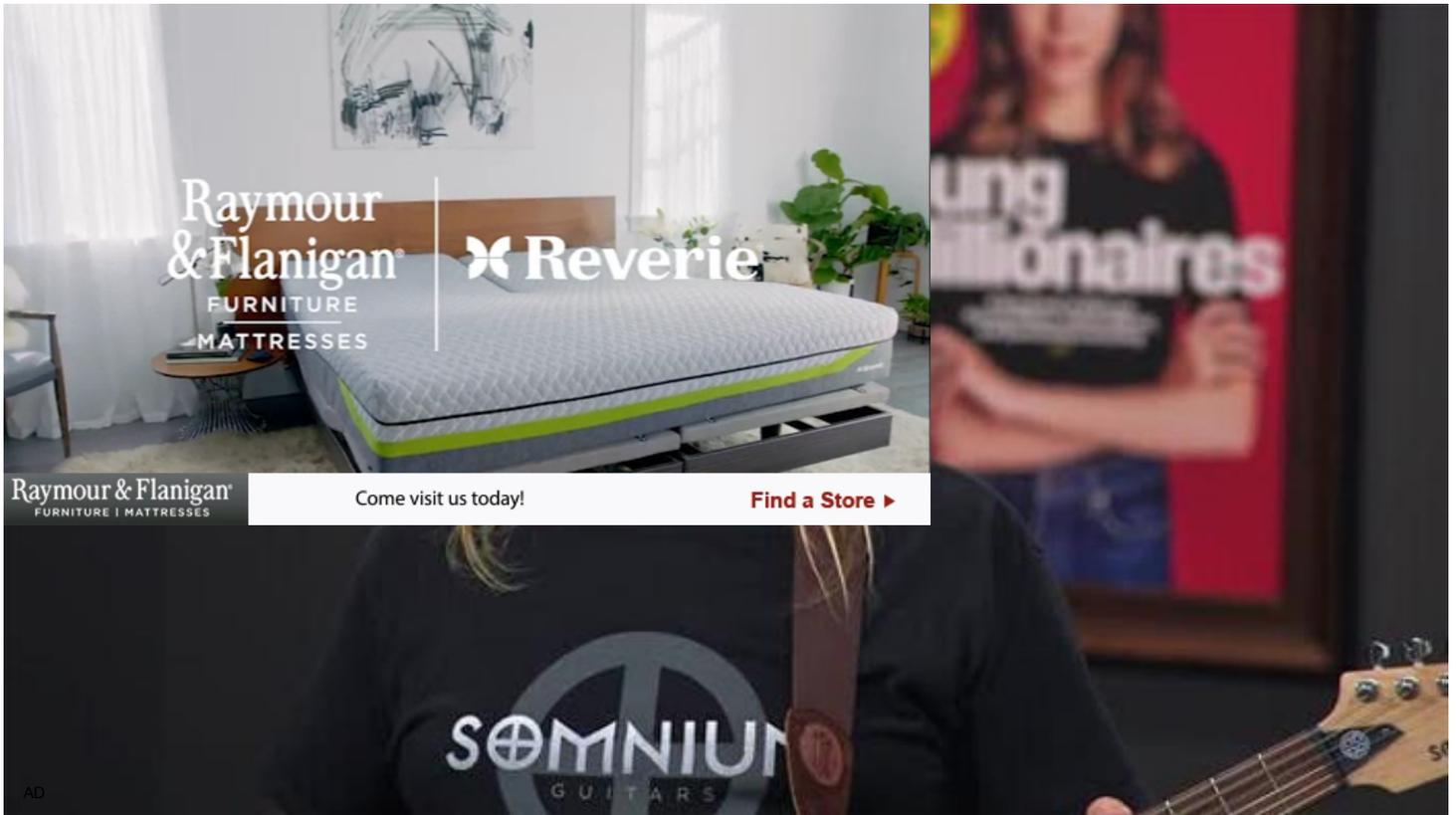


Haruki Murakami's short story "Sleep" is brought to the stage at the Harold Prince Theater, via the Annenberg Center. *Julieta Cervantes*

If you've ever read anything by Haruki Murakami ("1Q84," "Kafka on the Shore"), you know that he has a knack for composing subtle and unnerving narratives. His stories compel wonder out of the mundane and warns of the underlying dangers in the fabrics of daily life. His 1994 short story "Sleep" lives up to that expectation, and the Obie-winning, Brooklyn-based theater company Ripe Time will be bringing the world premiere to Philadelphia this weekend. Led by artistic director Rachel Dickstein, the company has garnered critical acclaim and devoted audiences for creating physically rigorous, visually powerful adaptations of classic and contemporary stories by authors.

"Sleep" centers on a young housewife who suffers a terrifying dream and suddenly stops sleeping. In her new sleep-deprived world, the constrictions of her prescribed role melt away, empowering her to take risks, indulge in the forbidden, and embrace the unpredictable. This liberation may be enthralling at first, but it forebodes that freedoms for women are still severely curbed. Her bout with insomnia serves as a metaphor for freeing oneself from numbing routines and expectations.

Adapted for the company by Alpert award-winner Naomi Iizuka, "Sleep" is a full sensory work that builds on Ripe Time's history of creating adventurous theater. "The aesthetic aspect of the theater company is to tell stories about women who are fighting against societal issues," Dickstein says in an interview. "Murakami created a world where a woman lives a quiet life as a housewife and goes through the looking glass into a surreal dream." What starts as a straddling along the lines of lucid dreams and uncanny insomnia evolves into the revelation a woman has about her potential and the battles that lie ahead as a result.



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"There are always restrictions on women, despite the sense that we've advanced," Dickstein adds. "This administration, this climate, and all the conversations of harassment and assault are proof that women aren't living free lives. We're often put in boxes for our personalities and our sexualities." At the core, "Sleep" is a story about a woman who realizes there is a possibility to live beyond prescriptive life. "At the end of the story, there's danger. There's suggestion of not necessarily an entirely free and happy path. We don't know if she will survive." The escape is an illusion hiding a much more precarious problem.

Preconceived notions of women and how they're expected to live their lives have long been challenged. But "once you break down those constrictions, you still need to rebuild that definition," Dickstein adds. "There's a continued fight. There is a revelation in the destruction and in the chaos and it's complicated."

Dickstein has created a timely, hypnotic work that explores a shifting universe of gender and power.

"Sleep" will make its debut Oct 27-28 at H&M

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By **Kyle Hiller** ([/profile/kyle-hiller](#)) Published : October 24, 2017

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