

FRINGEARTS

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Images available upon request

Toshiki Okada Knocks it Out of the Park

Japanese and Korean performers explore the global influence of America's favorite past-time in this American premiere tour stop at FringeArts

PHILADELPHIA – Toshiki Okada, one of Japan's most exciting theatrical voices, brings the American premiere of *God Bless Baseball* to FringeArts **January 21-23**. This playful take on the influence of America's favorite pastime on Japanese and Korean culture takes place at FringeArts' waterfront headquarters, 140 N Columbus Blvd. (at Race St.). Tickets cost between \$15 and \$29 and are available by phone at 215-413-1318 or online at FringeArts.com.

Two girls stand awkwardly on a baseball diamond with ill-fitting mitts and ask to learn the rules of the game. Two men explain the rules, but the girls frustrate their explanations to extreme degrees. Funny, awkward, painful, and both wide-ranging and very personal, *God Bless Baseball* reveals how deeply rooted the iconic American game is in everyday life in Japan and Korea, from the highest echelons of political power down into the most intimate family recollections.

Playwright and director Toshiki Okada is famous for taking on the peculiar idiosyncrasies and anxieties of contemporary life, and expanding them with unique choreography based on exaggerated everyday gestures. *God Bless Baseball* is performed by Japanese actors who play Korean roles (in Japanese) and Korean actors who play Japanese roles (in Korean).

Okada's works represent Japan's "lost generation," not unlike the United States' Millennial generation, who came of age during the Japanese recession of the 1990s. These young people were by and large forced to work as unskilled, part-time laborers, in jobs for which they were vastly overqualified. His works are distinguished by hyper-colloquial, deliberately inarticulate dialogue paired with highly stylized movement. His plays are choreographed, but are distinguished from dance by his focus on the "junk body" or "child's body", which rejects adult sexuality and Western dance techniques.

"I am always researching the relationship between speech and body," Okada says about his signature theatrical style. "I want to exaggerate this dance between speech and movement."

This is the second FringeArts presentation of Toshiki Okada, having previously curated *Hot Pepper*, *Air Conditioner*, and *The Farewell Speech* in the 2012 Fringe Festival. Okada also has a lengthy relationship with Dan Rothenberg, artistic director of Pig Iron Theater Company, with whom he collaborated on *Zero Cost House*, which was also in the Curated 2012 Fringe Festival.

Dan Rothenberg will be directing a reading of Okada's *Sonic Life of a Giant Tortoise* on Monday, January 18th. This reading is free and open to the public. He will also be moderating a talkback with Okada following the January 21st performance of *God Bless Baseball*.

ABOUT TOSHIKI OKADA:

Toshiki Okada is known around the world as one of the most groundbreaking playwrights and directors in Japanese theater today. His works are intrinsically Japanese, emerging from a contemporary setting with particular idiosyncrasies, anxieties and forms of expression. He formed the theater company chelfitsch in 1997 – naming it after a deliberate mispronunciation of the English word *selfish*. Its plays bring the intimacy of individual concerns into conversation with overshadowing issues, like the economic crisis or the cultural aftershocks of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. He is a winner of the Kishida Kunio Drama Award, Japan’s most prestigious honor for playwrights.

ABOUT FRINGEARTS:

FringeArts is one of the country’s foremost centers for contemporary performing arts, showcasing arts innovators from around the globe and cultivating world-class Philadelphia-based artists. FringeArts plays a vital role in Philadelphia’s vibrant artistic community by presenting a year-round programming series of cutting-edge dance, theater, and music performances presented at its striking venue on the Delaware waterfront; the annual Fringe Festival which takes over Philadelphia with hundreds of artistically daring and socially engaging performances; and by providing opportunities for Philadelphia artists to develop and showcase new work. FringeArts believes in art making that tests boundaries—inspiring new ideas, passionate discussion and conceptual thinking, all essential for a healthy and vibrant society.

FUNDER CREDITING

God Bless Baseball is commissioned by Asian Culture Complex - Asian Arts Theatre; co-produced by Asian Culture Complex- Asian Arts Theatre, Festival Tokyo, and Taipei Arts Festival; additional commissioning support provided by FringeArts, Philadelphia, Japan Society, New York, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland, and Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University; research and workshop support by Doosan Art Center; cooperation: Kinosaki International Arts Center, Steep Slope Studio, Sample

Toshiki Okada *God Bless Baseball* U.S. tour is funded by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan in the fiscal year 2015, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, The Japan Foundation through the *Performing Arts JAPAN* Program, and the Asian Cultural Council. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts

The New York Engagement of Toshiko Okada’s *God Bless Baseball* is made possible through the ArtsCONNECT program of Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

FACT SHEET FOR *GOD BLESS BASEBALL*

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

January 21 | 8:00pm

January 22 | 8:00pm

January 23 | 8:00pm

CREDITS

God Bless Baseball

Written and Directed by: Toshiki Okada

Performed by: Hiroyuki Hatakeyama, Yoonjae Lee, Aoi Nozu, and Sunghee Wi

TICKET INFORMATION

\$29 | \$20.30 for Members | \$15 for Students and Under-25

Call 215-413-1318 or visit www.fringearts.com to purchase tickets.

CALENDAR LISTING (+/- 100 WORDS)

What does the sport of baseball mean to you? Funny, awkward, painful, and both wide-ranging and very personal, *God Bless Baseball* reveals how deeply rooted the iconic American game is in everyday life in Japan and Korea, from the highest echelons of political power down into the most intimate family recollections. Playwright and director Toshiki Okada takes on the peculiar idiosyncrasies and anxieties of contemporary life, and expands them with unique choreography based on exaggerated everyday gestures. *God Bless Baseball* is performed by Japanese and Korean actors, with English supertitles.

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To request photos, interviews and more information please contact:

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