

Theater Review: Japanese Musical COUNT DOWN MY LIFE in Fringe NYC

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Around the world people set time limits for their goals. Married by age 25. Own a house by age 26. Two children by age 30. President of the company by age 40.



In *Count Down My Life*, a 29-year-old aspiring playwright sets a time limit for his career: Win a playwriting award for his script by the time he turns 30, or he will abandon his dream of working in the theater business. He puts all of his energy into writing the best play possible.

Japanese theatrical production company [TipTap](#)'s *Count Down My Life* had its US premiere on August 9 as part of the 17th annual New York International Fringe Festival 2013 ([FringeNYC](#)). The only Japanese entry in a field of more than 200 productions, the musical runs through August 13 at Theatre 80 on St. Marks Place.

Writer/lyricist/director Ikko Ueda, one of the founders of TipTap, acknowledged at a preview party held at RESOBOX art gallery that the musical is in part semi-autobiographical. He would not reveal which parts of the narrative connect directly to his life, but it's easy to appreciate that everyone faces giving up something precious to achieve one's goals.

The music by talented young composer Tokifumi Ozawa and the live band behind the curtain add another layer of texture to the production. The writing of *Count Down My Life* was in itself under a tight timeframe; Ueda and Ozawa had only two months to develop the storyline and create more than twenty songs. The tension of that deadline was only heightened by the fact that Ueda was in Fukuoka in Western Japan while collaborating with Ozawa, who was in Tokyo. Despite these

obstacles, Ozawa managed to find a melody to thread throughout the musical, and together they created an entertaining and thoughtful piece.

Although Ueda wanted to present *Count Down My Life* in English, FringeNYC producers advised against it, suggesting the original Japanese with English subtitles would be better. The subtitles appear on a large screen positioned house left, and they are not at all distracting.



Ikko Ueda (right) and Tokifumi Ozawa discuss the creative process at RESOBOX

The small cast has only five unnamed characters. As the playwright, the actor tekkan deftly handles his character's wide range of emotions while shouldering the majority of the singing and speaking in the almost two-hour show that has no intermission. Surrounded by the witty chorus (Megumi Iino, Yoko Inoue, Emiko Hijikata) and assisted by a mysterious fan (Kouta Someya), the playwright pours out script after script, all receiving rejection letters. While trying to avoid the distractions of daily life, the playwright becomes frustrated with the writing process, comparing himself to classmates who are getting married and who are more successful than he is.

After uncovering a dark secret in his life, the playwright receives inspiration from an almost mystical source and realizes that ultimately life doesn't work on the schedules we so thoughtfully set for it. Funny yet personal, *Count Down My Life* is a commentary about the decisions we make to pursue our dreams and the inevitable sacrifices along the way



Partial cast and crew of COUNT DOWN MY LIFE