

Hold Music

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reviewed by [Martin Denton](#) · March 12, 2011

Hold Music—which is being presented by Pegleg Productions as part of Culture Project's Women Center Stage festival—is one of the most engaging and exciting new works of theatre I've seen this season. Its creators are Calla Videt (director and co-writer) and B. Walker Sampson (co-writer) and they mark themselves as artists to keep an eye on with this inventive, lively, and intelligent physical theatre piece.

Its main subject, as the title suggests, is music. Much of it concerns a young man named Peter who has an "earworm" (i.e., a piece of music stuck in his head) and how that impacts his relationships, especially with Tessa, a young woman with a different kind of problem based around her ear (she suffers from vertigo). But narrative and plot are not what's important in *Hold Music*: what's best about this piece are the ways that Peter and Tessa sit at the center of a set of characters who each provide insight into ideas about sound and music, either directly (there's a lecturer teaching us facts about these topics, and an on-stage musician offering frequent illustration and counterpoint), or indirectly (a young woman who may also be a pickpocket who attends music theory class with Peter, and a window washer who is shielded from the outside world by a pair of headphones).

Even more fundamentally, *Hold Music* seems to be about shifting perspectives, morphing from one thing into another, and how time affects those concepts. Time changes what we see and hear and what we perceive when we see and hear; and what we see and hear and perceive change with time. *Hold Music* plays fast and loose with time and space, with locales shifting in our minds' eyes and literally on stage (a tabletop becomes a wall, then a library desk, then the side of a building, for example). And time is never linear here: characters move back and forth through that fourth dimension with liberating freedom, and even replay moments at different speeds to discover and explore what might otherwise be lost. In its exhilarating, free-wheeling style, it reminded me of one of Elwood P. Dowd's observations from Mary Chase's play *Harvey* (about his possibly imaginary best friend): "Einstein has overcome time and space. Harvey has overcome not only time and space—but any objections."

Videt's staging is fluid, fun, and playful. With designers Ji-young Chang (set), Mary E. Stebbins (lighting), Laura Hirschberg (props), Trevor J. Martin (video), and Ginia Sweeney (costumes), she creates a constantly shifting landscape for the ensemble to realize all of the surprising and delightful twists and turns of the play. That ensemble is spectacularly good: they will remind you of a well-trained repertory company of long-standing more than the cast of a new theatre company's festival offering. Two actors portray Peter—Josh Osdess-Rubin plays "Past Peter" and also doubles in various other roles, while Arlo Hill is a standout as "Future Peter," in one sequence seeming to defy gravity as he leaps from place to place on the stage until finding himself atop the piano. Hill sings and dances with grace and ease as well. (The excellent choreography is by Ricky and Jeffrey Kuperman.) Pixieish Aya Tucker is memorable as the pickpocket and the window washer, while Avery Pearson is terrific in two mostly comic roles, the lecturer and Peter's doctor. (The lecturer's pronunciation of the name of a famous contemporary singer/songwriter is one of the show's biggest laughs.) Rounding out the company are Merrie Jane Brackin, Whitney Morse, and, on the piano, Arlen Hart. This is a formidably talented set of performers. Pearson and Hart's impromptu duet on the piano after the curtain call was another highlight.

I love theatre that takes me on a journey somewhere I've never gone before...never even thought to go! *Hold Music's* exploration of the world of sounds and music offers surprise after surprise, up-ending our expectations of narrative storytelling and flouting all the physics that its characters spend a good deal of time discussing and explaining. I will definitely be on the lookout for the next show from Pegleg Productions. And I think we can infer something very positive about the curatorial skill that's gone into Culture Project's Women Center Stage festival as well.



Pictured: Avery Pearson and Arlo Hill in a scene from Hold Music