

# **'Elegies' in earnest**

## ***Song cycle makes for touching, unconventional theater***

By Paul Wozniak for the Lansing City Pulse  
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To really appreciate “Elegies,” Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.’s latest production, you have to take it on its terms.

“Elegies” describes itself as a “song cycle,” not a musical. While “Elegies” is a collection of thematically related Review songs, it lacks the central story, blocking and characters one would normally associate with musical theater. That said, each song tells a story. It’s almost like a sung version of “The Moth Radio Hour.”

Add to that a “no applause between songs” request, and “Elegies” feels more like a somber church concert than anything resembling a Broadway show. And while “Elegies” may not be the type of musical fare we’ve come to expect from Peppermint Creek, it is sung beautifully and frequently pulls at the heart strings.

The cast, made up of Sandy Buchanan Sykes, Ben Cassidy, Bill Henson, Emily McKay and Matt Eldred (who also directed the performance), take turns singing stories of characters and memories, recalling pleasure and pain through their mini-narrative journeys.

In “Only One,” Sykes proudly recalls being the toughest teacher in her school district and the “only one” whose students aced the standardized tests. Henson presents the excitement and eccentric characters of “Mark’s All-Male Thanksgiving.” McKay’s strongest number, “Passover,” distills all of the joy and awkwardness of large family gatherings. Cassidy, in “My Dogs,” connects to every pet owner as he remembers the quirks and flaws of his dogs. The song features the poignant rhetorical question, “Why is it only dogs I love that die?”

For all the subtlety and humor in songs like “My Dogs,” “Elegies” provides plenty of less subtle songs, such as “Boom Boom” or “Goodbye (Finale),” where the singers belt out their lines as if pain is best conveyed by volume.

Fortunately, Bill Bartleson’s sound design seamlessly blends the voices with pianist John Dale Smith’s flawless accompaniment. At the MICA Gallery in Old Town, the combined effect of all five voices in harmony with Smith’s fiery piano was electric. Hopefully the cast can retain that intimate energy at the more spacious Miller Performing Arts Center this weekend.

### **“Elegies”**

Peppermint Creek Theatre Co. 8 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 20-Friday, Aug. 21 \$10 Miller Performing Arts Center 6025 Curry Lane, Lansing (517) 927-3016, peppermintcreek.org