

Long Wharf Sings Their Stories

by LUCY GELLMAN | Jan 28, 2016 1:04 pm

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Swaying just slightly at the center of Long Wharf Theatre's main stage, singer Chris Peters was bringing the audience into his latest performance of "Paul & Eddy's Pipe Dream Pizza," weaving together worlds of fantasy romance and [Hamden haute cuisine](#). Light fell over his face and slipped onto his guitar as audience members laughed softly with the wedding-themed lyrics:

*The service would be at Hogwarts /
with Dumbledore presiding /
Dino from the Flintstones /
would bear the ring /
and Paul and Eddy's Pizza / would do the catering.*

Peters was one of 12 acts in "Sing Your Story," a New Haven and Connecticut songwriting competition inspired by a singer-songwriter play currently playing at Long Wharf's stage two, Benjamin Scheuer's [The Lion](#).

Peters and 10 other singer-songwriters were selected to perform Monday night from out of 90 artists who submitted videos. The judges making the selection were Steve Rodgers, Kevin Ewing, and Sarah Sherban. A final group, Cometa, was also given a spot for their most-watched video, which garnered 548 views and 270 likes on YouTube.

“We’ve been overwhelmed by the level of talent, and I’m so excited,” LWT Community Engagement Manager Elizabeth Nearing said at the beginning of the evening.



I’ll be honest. When I arrived at Long Wharf Theatre for the event, a not insignificant part of me was worried that “Sing Your Story” would come off as a twee-soaked acoustic guitar fest fit for [Portlandia](#). Not that there’s anything inherently wrong with that — indie-pop favorites from [Frontier Ruckus](#) to [She & Him](#) have built lauded careers on it. But the genre can be particularly icky and cloying, best reserved for [jazz brunches](#) and coffeeshop soundtracks. Having listened to most of the 90 submissions, I was bummed to see names like Isabella Mendes, Ashley Hamel, and Adam Matlock bumped from the list for groups who the genre, in its cutesy glory, fit like a glove.

But I shook the concerns off. The judges — particularly Rodgers, owner of Hamden’s [The Space](#) — knew their music; I wasn’t ready to dismiss the soundness of their judgements.

And to my delight, the fear was (mostly) for naught. “Sing Your Story,” it turned out, was like a good, and supportive, open mic. Surprises like New Haven’s [Talya Braverman](#), who has an extremely mature voice for her 14 years, popped out of the woodwork. Peters charmed the audience with his gentle sense of humor. Winner Tina Colon, an immigration lawyer and pastor at Elm City Vineyard Church, was captivating in her performance of “[What I’m Looking For](#),” as was [beloved Elm Citizen](#) Jeremiah Brown.

The highlights of the night were the entries that took the tired singer/songwriter theme to a new, genre-shrugging level. “The Letter,” a bluegrassy entry by the Shoregrass Trio (written by the Trio’s Barbara Shaw), came off as both heartfelt and fresh, standing out in grouping of songs that had a certain Imma-be-the-next-Natalie-Merchant quality to them. Ibn Orator’s “[Ghetto Gospel](#)” served American history exactly as it is (in primary season, no less), giving the night an unexpected jolt into the present.



LUCY GELLMAN PHOTO

From left to right Grant: Cometa, Barbara and Frank Shaw, Jeremiah Brown, Adam Christoferson, Tina Colon.

While Colon left with the grand prize — four hours of recording time at [Baobab studios](#), and a performance at one of Arts & Ideas’ [pop-up festivals](#) — the other contestants on stage shared a second reward of the night: a realization that the city’s music community could be that much more tightly knit, and a little more robust than anyone might have imagined.

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