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## Plot inconsistencies defy 'Reason'

By TERRY BYRNE

"Reason" is less about a rational discussion than it is about random connections, both made and missed.

Celebrated theater artist Ping Chong's latest collaboration with writer Michael Rohd, now having its world premiere at the Market Theater, results in an evening that is

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both fascinating and frustrating.

An ensemble of nine actors delivers deeply passionate performances, made only more impressive by the limited movement allowed in their window-space performing zones. Each of the dozens of unrelated scenes, layered on one another with a delicate sense of cinematic editing, fairly crackles with the emotional precision of the performers, even though the cumulative effect is never as powerful as we hope.

The series of scenes serve as emotional snapshots of characters including a lonely businessman finding unique ways to deal with his isolation; a college professor who is slowly losing her grip on reality even as she lectures her students on the complexity of consciousness; a train engineer who is contemplating his mortality even as his physical therapist, a young Russian emigre, works to bring him back into the world; and two world travelers who don't know how to stop moving even when they come crashing into each other.

Even though the plot outlines are often disjointed and incomplete, each vignette draws us into its story line so completely and Chong's ensemble creates such fully realized characters that we are eager to take a ride with them no matter where they're going.

Ray McDavitt, as the businessman, creates a searing portrayal of a

*"Reason," presented by the Market Theater and the Office for the Arts at Harvard, at the Market Theater, One Winthrop Square, Cambridge, through March 17.*

man who is at first meek and defeated and then finds strength in an oddly manipulative move. The beautiful Olga V. Fedorishcheva is breathtaking as the Russian emigre learning how to get around the system to survive. Young Eliza Rose Fichter offers another of her stunning performances as the professor's daughter who must cope with her mother's withdrawal, and Beth Phillips offers an assured working mom, whose classroom lectures are surreal.

Ray Jenness' old train engineer is honest and unaffected as a man pondering whether it's time to check out. Ryan Keilty and Angela Mi Young Hur are oddly suited as the mismatched couple who can't manage more than a glancing connection. Susan Thompson is serenely composed as the dreamy though determined Meredith. And Jojo Karlin is amusing as a mix of stereotypes, including perky friend, obnoxious student, potential date and train official.

As a director, Chong blends a heady mix of theatrical, musical and visual effects: the intensely intimate portraits; a score ranging from a foreboding train whistle to Bach cello suites and Brazilian

sambas and recorded voices mingling with live actors; and a collection of brightly colored slides that starts with a single vertical or horizontal bar and then add a line with each scene until they build to a busy, nearly checkerboard pattern of intersecting lines that is always mesmerizing.

But even as we are entranced by the nuances of these complex portraits, at the end we are left unsatisfied. Although the ingredients Chong and Rohd have collected have some fabulous flavors, they never manage to blend them together to make a complete meal.