



# The Star-Ledger

## Weighted Words in Clever Play

By [Ronni Reich](#) for [The Star-Ledger](#) | February 4, 2013

There's the man who cannot say three little words. There's the woman who finds her joy and purpose when she abandons the life she knows to follow a dream. Then there's the idea that when we are in love, we are all beautiful.

"The Language Archive" by Julia Cho does not appear to be made for those averse to romantic comedy tropes or sentimentality. But Cho puts an original twist on the formula, and Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre in Summit offers an endearing production.

**"An endearing production"**

Directed by Laura Ekstrand, the play centers on George (Scott McGowan), a linguist who struggles to articulate "I love you." His emotionally fluent wife, Mary (Nicole

Callender), speaks of the different types of crying in a way that calls to mind the belief that Eskimos have many words for snow.

To George, there is nothing sadder than the death of a language, and he has the opportunity to preserve one when he meets Alta and Resten (Noreen Farley and Harry Patrick Christian), the two last speakers of Elloway. Theirs is a language in which time is an abstract and relative concept — and there are no angry words.

That's why they only speak English when they arrive, looking like a familiar old couple bickering about airplane window seats and the quality of the wife's cooking before punishing each other with silence.

JANUARY 2013

What: **THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE**  
New Jersey premiere  
by Julia Cho



Dates: January 25 – February 10

Times: Friday at 8pm  
Saturday at 8pm  
Sunday at 2pm

Place: **Oakes Center** in Summit [Directions](#)

Cost: \$30 adults  
\$25 seniors & students

[Buy tickets](#) no fees!



Nicole "Callender adeptly navigates her character's emotional extremes."

**"Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre in Summit offers an endearing production."**

- Ronni Reich, *The Star-Ledger*



Scott “McGowan brings an energetic, boyish presence to the cerebral George.”

Callender adeptly navigates her character’s emotional extremes as well as her more complex feelings for George. McGowan brings an energetic, boyish presence to the cerebral George.

As George’s assistant Emma — who one character describes as “blind” due to unrequited love — Janet Sales is a captivating storyteller and winsomely conveys her

uncontainable, all-encompassing affection.

Farley and Christian appear in multiple roles, including an Esperanto instructor, a mysterious old man with a gift for Mary, and Zamenhof, the founder of Esperanto.

Farley is larger-than-life in Alta’s outbursts and as Emma’s baritone language teacher, but it is in her quieter moments — whispering the musical *Elboway* at Resten’s beside, and lyrically narrating the end of her character’s story in an epilogue — that she enchants. Christian looks young for Resten but his animated performance and precise comic timing make for a standout turn.

A giant mound of scraps of paper that say “I love you” in different languages dominates Dave Maulbeck’s set, creating an unexpected, fitting image. Designer Zach Pizza’s lighting effectively aids the audience in making seamless setting shifts among various onstage locales.

Ekstrand’s costumes include a bright yellow trench coat for Mary to start her new life, and a long peasant skirt and red, fringed sweater for Alta that add to a visually vibrant presentation. A dream ballet for George and Emma is one of her more memorable directorial choices that accentuate the piece’s playful, fantastical side.

“The Language Archive” is not without its contrivances — George is impossibly dense; there is more than one chance, life-changing meeting at a train station.

At the end of the play, Alta tells the audience a legend of two lovers who became trees that twine around each other when they died. She knows it’s an old myth, but why not imagine that something so lovely could be true? It takes that kind of surrender to accept Cho’s own mythology.



Harry Patrick Christian’s (center) “animated performance and precise comic timing make for a standout turn.” Noreen Farley “enchants.”



“Janet Sales is a captivating storyteller and winsomely conveys her uncontainable, all-encompassing affection.”

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