

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY  
**GUARDIAN**

## Harmonic canons

*Schick Machine* hits the right notes

03.22.11 | Robert Avila

A gorgeous clutter of instruments fills the stage at Z Space/Theater Artaud this week, and audiences, after an eye- and earful of *Schick Machine*, are invited to go up and play them, too. A musical background is unnecessary: Nothing on stage likely resembles anything you grew up practicing, and anyway all that's called for is a little rhythm. The show itself gives you a healthy dose, amid a wonderfully designed, gently madcap, almost cosmological musing on the nature and origins of rhythm as well as our yearning embrace of it (and vice versa).

The Paul Dresher Ensemble's *Schick Machine* — a collaboration with, among others, writer/director Rinde Eckert — gives the stage over to master percussionist and contemporary music veteran Steven Schick. In the character of musical inventor Laszlo Klangfarben, Schick wanders around a garden playground laboratory of ingeniously crafted percussive and stringed instruments (composer Dresher's fanciful yet practicable inventions), against a video backdrop evocative of everything from superstrings to abstract expressionist painting to architectural blueprints and scientific scribbings. The instruments of wood and steel form elegant ridges, playful spirals, majestic fans, Ferris wheel-like magic circles, and sonic tulip patches — a kind of Eden for a lone but rarely lonesome madman. Schick's balding head and glasses compliment the mad scientist look, though his outfit — a high blue apron over white shirt and thin tie — calls to mind an old fashioned small-town grocer.

The thinly-sketched narrative is an excuse for a quiet and contemplative piece of theater, though great explosions of rhythm are mixed in with the goofy humor and crisp, enrapturing visual aesthetic. At the center of it all, the piece suggests, is a single heartbeat.

