

<http://www.portlandmercury.com/theater/2017/02/08/18838044/profile-theatres-new-season-is-already-great>

[Theater Feb 8, 2017](#)

Profile Theatre's New Season Is Already Great

Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue Captures the Tenor of a Country at War with Itself

by [Megan Burbank](#)



Jimmy Garcia and Cristi Miles in *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*. David Kinder

I KNOW YOU'RE scared of your Twitter feed right now, and I have the cure: Go see Pulitzer winner/Lin-Manuel Miranda collaborator Quiara Alegria Hudes' play *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue* at Profile Theatre.

“BUT MEGAN,” you say. “I AM NOT A MILLION YEARS OLD AND I'M FRANKLY OFFENDED YOU'D EVEN SUGGEST THIS. I HATE LIVE THEATER AND NEVER GO.”

You do now, champ. Or at least you do *this time*. Because it's not often you have the chance to see a play that's politically relevant, mercifully brief, and delicately balanced between drama and restraint, with lyrical dialogue and a lot of hip-hop and reggaeton used to clever effect.

Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue is one of those plays that makes me breathe a sigh of relief I'm not watching yet another dull examination of rich white people feuding over a house. Profile's staff couldn't have anticipated that Hudes' play—about three generations of a Puerto Rican military family during a dark time in American history—would resonate so deeply with the current political climate, but it does.

The Elliot of the title is a young Marine who's among the first American troops to be deployed to Iraq after 9/11. He's also the child and grandchild of veterans: His parents met in Vietnam, where his father was a soldier and his mother was a military nurse, and his grandfather served in Korea. Anthony Lam, who, like everyone in this cast, turns in a solid performance, portrays Elliot as childlike, but with flashes of accidental brilliance suggesting who he'll be as an older adult. In this sense, he's like a lot of 19-year-olds—and his story isn't strictly tragic, although it does capture the elliptical futility of war, as foreign conflicts are passed down from generation to generation like the flute Elliot's grandfather gives to his father, who doesn't even know how to play it.

There are only four characters in this play, and every performance is as effective as it needs to be—particularly Cristi Miles as Elliot's mother, Ginny, whose role as an army nurse turned loving gardener sounds like a stereotype in print, but is much more complex in Hudes' script and in Miles' performance. She also gets all the best lines, as when she describes her approach to working with traumatized soldiers: "Don't look at his wound; look at him." Jimmy Garcia puts in a strong turn as Elliot's dad, and Anthony Green captures the dreamy affect of an un-jaded old man as Elliot's grandfather.

Through smart pacing, occasional humor, a strong sense of place, and subtly effective design and sound choices—like the grounding buzz of a freeway, or the comforting fact that no prop weapons appear—*Elliot* achieves political relevancy and emotional power without pulling any punches or leaving you feeling even more weighed down by fear and dread than when you came in.

Making good on the theater company's commitment to producing plays by women and playwrights of color, *Elliot* is a promising beginning to Profile's year dedicated to Hudes' body of work. At the end of the performance I attended, the audience just sat a long time after the cast left the stage, clapping and clapping in a group display of enthusiasm that was both remarkably adorable and perfectly correct—it was the only time in recent memory in this standing-ovation-loving city that I've seen an audience embody exactly how I felt about what I'd just seen. *Elliot* is the first in a connected trilogy of plays Profile will produce during its new season. I can't wait to see what future installments in the Ortiz family's saga have in store.