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A Musical Nearly a Decade in the Making

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By Chris Klimek

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Art is war, and war has casualties. "The stuff I've thrown away from this show," marvels composer Paul Scott Goodman, "three, four musicals' worth, easy."

Goodman and his wife, actress and director Miriam Gordon, are the force behind "Rooms: A Rock Romance," an original musical that opens tonight at Alexandria's MetroStage. A tale of struggling singer-songwriters set in the late 1970s, it springs from a partnership both creative and domestic: The couple collaborated on the story, and Goodman wrote the music and lyrics. How much harder are endings than beginnings? Er, about 4.7 times as hard: "The first half took a year and half to write," Goodman says by phone from the couple's New York City home. "The second half took seven."

Director Scott Schwartz, who has been helping the couple refine the piece since 2003, says the show's gestation is not unusual. "Musicals are complicated," he says. "You can talk and theorize," but with butts in the seats, everything changes. A six-show workshop run at the 2005 New York Musical Theatre Festival, followed by two readings in October 2006, helped the team diagnose and correct problems in the 90-minute show's last third. "It wasn't until we got it in front of an audience that we could really finish it," Schwartz says.

"Rooms" follows Goodman's own late-'70s-to-mid-'80s flight path -- from Scotland to London to New York City -- but there's a wrinkle and a romantic twist: The female character, Monica (played by [Natascia Diaz](#)), is based on him ("a little Jewish boy from Scotland, walking around in my flared trousers and my sweater"), and the male character, Ian (Doug Kreeger), is based on Goodman's working-class, Catholic songwriting partner at the time.

As a teen in Glasgow, Goodman played in a band called the 4 Skins. He moved to London in 1977, at the height of punk, and in 1984 to Manhattan, determined to break into musical theater. Perhaps his best-known work is "Bright Lights, Big City," the 1999 off-Broadway musical adapted from Jay McInerney's novel. Goodman has otherwise devoted himself to completely original material. He wrote "Rooms" on a 12-string guitar, and the show uses a

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"Rooms: A Rock Romance" is a tale of struggling singer-songwriters Monica (played by Natascia Diaz) and Ian (Doug Kreeger) set in the late 1970s. The story also follows composer Paul Scott Goodman's path during that period from Scotland to London to New York City. (By Colin Hovde)

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Goodman and Gordon, who have collaborated on several shows, met waiting tables at O'Neill's, a restaurant near [Lincoln Center](#) favored by opera types. They were married in 1986 and have three teenage children, a son and two daughters. "I've strongly discouraged them from going into show business," Goodman says.

The two are involved in separate projects. Goodman is tinkering with "Alive in the World," a musical he's writing "about life and love in New York City post-9/11."

And Gordon is working on "Not for Better," a show about divorce.

There's a pause.

"I'm not collaborating on that," her husband interjects dryly.

Their show might have taken nearly a decade to find its tempo, but in this moment, his timing is perfect.

Rooms: A Rock Romance MetroStage, 1201 N. Royal St., Alexandria. 800-494-8497. <http://www.metrostage.org>. Through Sept. 7. \$40-\$45.

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