



Camille LeFevre offers insight into the complexities of this darkly glimmering fable told in dance and inspired by "The Little Prince" and "The Gods Must Be Crazy."

As a relative newcomer to [Off-Leash Area](#)'s dance/theater productions, I'd never seen where Paul Herwig and Jennifer Ilse began, and regularly return to: the garage behind their house in the Longfellow neighborhood of Minneapolis—a performance space otherwise known as [Our Garage](#). Until now, I'd only seen the company's concert-stage work.

Crimes and Whispers, the duo's foray into tango with Gerry Girouard a couple of steamy summers ago, was performed in a stifling-hot studio on Hennepin Avenue and utilized a choreographic blend of tango, twisted up-the-wall, acrobatic, and break-dance moves. [Maggie's Brain](#), performed at the Playwright's Center last year, was a tour de force of emotional honesty and dramatic credibility because of Ilse's deft handling of psychological deterioration via restrained gestures and economically deployed modern-dance movements. The Warholian spoof, [Our Perfectly Wonderful Lives](#), part of the [Momentum Dance Series](#) last summer, was a goofy and incisive look at our complicity (whether individual or institutional) in art as commerce and celebrity as culture.

The tiny gem currently playing in Our Garage, [A Gift for Planet BX63](#), while reflecting bits of what's come before, is something altogether different from Off-Leash Area's stage performances. Amidst black drapery studded with tiny lights, Elena Gianetti rises to narrate the story of a little girl and her perilous journey into commercialism. Gianetti is a glossy, glimmering narrator who's something of a black hole: a force that draws stories of loss, love and war deep into her infinite memory. Like the other two characters in the show, the girl (Ilse) and the intergalactic salesman (Herwig), the narrator speaks in rhyme (the text is by Max Sparber), sending forth her tale with an almost Seuss-like telling.

Here is the lonely girl in her simple, spare house, content to collect stardust and shape it into luminous art objects. She moves in her house (all of Herwig's sets are brilliantly plain, yet evocative) largely by scooting around on her knees, or butt or shoulders. Her legs are up on the walls or crooked in the air (remembrances of Girouard's movement in *Crimes and Whispers*).

As Ilse renders her, the girl is a wide-eyed innocent, almost mute, who conveys worlds of emotions in the clearest of expressions. She's captivating to watch. And the girl's art-making process is as straightforward as it is mysterious: all it takes is a dust catcher, a bowl, a set of gestures, and magic.

When the salesman set down in front of her house—noisily and clumsily, as his bent-over, heavy, stumbly body isn't used to the planet's gravity—the kids in the audience giggled with delight. Dressed in his purples, stripes, and multifaceted hat, Herwig's character talks and cajoles, entices and rhymes. The girl's slow to catch on. What ensues is trade, ecstasy, disappointment, then more and more and more trade to keep the new object of her happiness alive until her cache of luminous creations—and even the means to make more—have been thoroughly depleted.

Meanwhile, her tiny house has become crowded with boxes, bottles, and jugs. The only object left to her—and it's of questionable beauty and value—is plastic. She's so overtaken, so bereft, that her only recourse is to cast herself back into the universe. As a cautionary tale about the depletion of the world's resources and our inability to resist the destructive lure of consumerism, *A Gift for Planet BX63* is dark indeed.

But it's also a complex one. The object from the salesman's valise that the girl so desperately desires, that requires such devotion she's driven to ruin, is initially a balm for her loneliness and something singularly alive. A flower. Even the act of caring, this production seems to say, can be thwarted by the inability to know when enough is enough, allowing goofily disarming snakes in the grass to better peddle their favorite snake oil.

About the reviewer: Camille LeFevre is a Twin Cities arts journalist and dance critic.