

# Theater Spotlight: *Border Crossing*

By [Quinton Skinner](#)



Image by courtesy of Off-Leash Area

## **BORDER CROSSING**

*Off-Leash Area; at the Ritz Theatre through May 4*  
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It's difficult to imagine any work about the U.S.-Mexico border and illegal immigration not being laden with considerable political baggage, but Off-Leash Area has managed the feat with *Border Crossing*, which mixes the ethereal with the concrete and ends up an occasionally evocative meditation. The action is a bit circular, rotating among depictions of desperate people trying to cross the desert into America and monologues by various folks who play out the issues involved. There is a border patrolman (Pedro Fonseca) who talks about the "war against illegals," then goes into a minor rhapsody about all the high-tech equipment at his disposal. Later we meet a park ranger (Adri Mehra), who describes his turf as a "war zone" complete with thirst-wearied illegal immigrants wrecking the ecosystem in order to extract drinking water from plants. Any hint of polemic is deftly avoided here, though the show struggles to find traction in the first half-hour. It rewards patience afterward, largely through Paul Herwig's design (along with Mike Grogan's lights, turning the sky all the vivid colors of the desert day and night) and Jennifer Ilse's athletic and agitated but precise choreography. Ilse plays a coyote in half-mask, seducing a group of migrants (Dana Buchwald, Erin Drummond, Zeb Henderson Shreve, and John Zeiler) with dreams of *El Norte*, then later mocking them with torturous visions of how their lives are really going to turn out. In between we have an ensemble of six costumed players credited as the Desert's Spirit, evoking life, death, and eternity in solemn group movement (at one point transforming themselves into a giant desert spider, a creepy and arresting image). The last third of this 90-minute performance is largely given over to the spirits and the migrants, alternating movement segments that deepen in intensity. This is a work in search not of answers but of the intangible truths beneath the hard realities. Quite frequently it finds those elusive ghosts.