

THEATER | "The Picnic" at Off-Leash Area: The garage bands of theater

By [Trang Do](#), [TC Daily Planet](#)

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Can love be found in a city park? Can a bird and a dog sit down for picnics and find mutual attraction? Can the flame of new love continue to burn with the passing of the seasons? Can a theatrical performance with seasoned performers and playwrights be successfully viewed in a quirky space such as someone's backyard garage? The answer to all these questions is most definitely yes.

On Oct. 21, 2011, Off-Leash Area premiered *The Picnic*, a dance narrative of new love brought to life by dancer-actors Jordan Klitzke and Jennifer Ilse. The play premiered in a 40-seat theater garage in the Longfellow neighborhood home of co-artistic directors Paul Herwig and Jennifer Ilse. The experience of attending a show in a garage space aptly called Our Garage with an invitation to hang out afterwards in Our Backyard by the fire pit for refreshments felt very welcoming and "Minnesotan." To be able to view a quality show in an unconventional setting reminded me that plays do not always have to be contained in an established building. Art in unexpected places has the extra draw of feeling more inclusive and serves as a reminder that art should be made accessible to anyone who wants to experience it.

The Picnic was a charming and quirky love story between a bird and a dog that meet at a city park. Their interaction was told through dance with music composed by Ben Siems and recorded by innovative jazz trio The Willie August Project. Dancer-actors Jordan Klitzke and Jennifer Ilse did a nice job of portraying their avian and canine characters as they built a friendship and fell in love while dancing under the trees of the park. The story was introduced and carried through by a very oddball Parks and Recreation maintenance man played by Paul Herwig. His speech was affected in strange word salads, speaking in broken rhymes as he searches for the right words while stumbling along in frustration and confusion. But what he lacked in verbal agility, he made up for as his of mystical weatherman with the power to artfully change the color of the leaves, cause rain, paint the sun, and grow flowers. He was the observer of the bird and dog's love which waxed and waned with the changing of the seasons.

Spring is about the new growth that brings in first meetings and new friendships. Summer is of heat and love. Fall is of fading colors and discovered differences. A bird and a dog do have different ways of experiencing the world. Winter is cold and even the heat of a fire is barely enough to keep the two warm. Love is set to change like the trees that grow and shed through the seasons. Can a bird and dog still find attraction in each other with another picnic in the park? Can the love shared between a bird and a dog carry through into the next cycle of seasons? Can the age-worn story of new love, change, and loss still carry enough appeal and have the audience hope for love?

The answer, again, is most definitely yes.

For someone looking for a more complex plot with action and dialogue, *The Picnic* is probably not it; the storyline is not particularly novel. But the show itself, housed in a garage space that juxtaposes discovery and familiarity, makes future productions at Off-Leash Area worth keeping tabs on.

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