

OnSite's three short plays come with treats



Playwright Carter W Lewis

'**A PRAYER FOR THE GUN BUG**' Judith Newmark is the Post-Dispatch theater critic.

One thing about [OnSite Theatre](#) shows: They're always entertaining.

Offbeat OnSite specializes in site-specific theater — plays that are written for it and for the unlikely venue that it turns into “stages.”

Past locations have included a bowling alley, a day care center and a laundromat. OnSite doesn't simply find a space and pretend it's something else; the venue is essential to the story. This time, with “A Prayer for the Gun Bug,” the locale is Meskerem, an Ethiopian restaurant on South Grand Boulevard.

What do people do in restaurants? They eat, they talk — and sometimes they talk about eating. The situation gives playwright Carter Lewis, director Bill Whitaker and the cast ample opportunity to have fun with our preconceptions, creating comedy through three short plays. The intermissions provide a fine time to order a drink at the bar in the adjacent room, or to sample the delicious snacks on each table.

In the first play, “No-Preying,” two friends who go to the same church (Peggy Billo and Jacqueline Thompson) discuss their different attitudes toward public religious expression — until they are distracted by a very unusual diner (Pete Winfrey) whom they find impossible to ignore. (So will you.)

In “A Geometric Digression of the Species,” a married couple (Billo and Gary Wayne Barker) on a rare night out vent their dissatisfaction with the state of our overcrowded, overused planet — never thinking that they might be in any way responsible. But when the waiters (Winfrey and Paul Edwards) bring problems to their attention, they are forced to reconsider, especially the wife.

Maybe her husband should think a little less globally and more locally, she says (though in a much funnier way). Barker, an actor who often graces dramas, reminds us here that his proper, buttoned-up manner is great for comedy, too — especially in a smart little play like this one.

All the actors appear in “Art Control,” the third, and weakest, piece. It's a little too silly, especially when it heads into meta-drama (the actors talk about being in a play). But Lewis' script never takes itself too seriously, and neither do Whitaker and his able cast.

You may find, to your own surprise, that these plays have left you something to chew on.