

A Potential Disaster in Any Language

He's a modern-day Noah, looking to ride out the next great flood in an ark made of rotting plastic. Small balloons tethered

**Laura
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**THEATER
REVIEW**

Turned down, he vows to go straight to the people.

"Crowdfunding," Noah (Luigi Cerri) says, and with that single word of English, he gets a laugh.

But such a vital connection with the audience is mostly missing from "Gaïa Global Circus," a thoughtful climate-change play by Pierre Daubigny, performed almost entirely in French with English supertitles at the Kitchen, where it is presented with the Brown Institute of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

Produced by Compagnie AccenT and Soif Compagnie, the play was conceived by the French philosopher Bruno Latour, who has long engaged with environmental dilemmas. Billed as the centerpiece of four days of Latour events at Columbia this week, the play takes aim at a problem he has described as the "abysmal distance between our little selfish human worries and the great questions of ecology": our failure to feel much of anything in the face of the climate crisis.

In a series of vignettes performed beneath a billowing, floating canopy (by Olivier Vallet), "Gaïa Global Circus" wants to rouse us from our collective shrug. It attempts this in part by invoking figures from mythology, like the Greek goddess Gaïa, who personifies the Earth, and Cassandra, the prophet whose curse was that she would not be believed. Climate scientists, the play suggests, are similarly spurned.

But the dialogue-heavy pro-

to his jacket float jauntily above his head as he applies for a loan to build the boat.



PAULA COURT

Gaïa Global Circus *This series of vignettes about climate change was performed this week at the Kitchen beneath a billowing canopy.*

duction, directed by Frédérique Aït-Touati and the philosopher's daughter, Chloé Latour, is stymied by a design problem. Instead of watching the play, non-Francophone spectators must direct their attention to one of two small monitors off to either side

A call (mostly in French) for action on global warming.

of the stage to read supertitles that often translate only a bit of what's being said.

On Wednesday night, the disconnect was palpable. The fine, hardworking cast of four and its attentive audience were caught, most of the time, on opposite sides of a language barrier, which was in turn an impediment to emotion.

The most successful moments

tend to be wordless, or nearly so: When people begin to riot in a scene of apocalyptic chaos that evokes Anne Washburn's "Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play"; when a storm from what seems like the end of the world rumbles through and makes our bodies vibrate; when, at last, the floating canopy envelops us and we feel strangely safe.

There is another scene, too, in which a girl (Jade Collinet) speaks with adolescent passion about the Beatles song "She's Leaving Home." As it plays, she addresses us in English, and the moment is completely alive, a tender reminder of what is sweet about each new generation. It does what the play intends: calls to mind in a visceral way why we need to keep this home of ours healthy.