Windmill Director Cate Fowler describes Twinkle Twinkle Little Fish as a production which was determined to be born. Commissioned for the 1998 Out of the Box Festival in Brisbane, it nearly stayed in its box when ACT based Company Skylark crashed after an embezzlement scandal. Fowler found rescue funds and the creative team - director Simon Phillips, puppeteer Peter Wilson and composer Ian McDonald saw the project through.

Now, four years later, this charming work based on the hugely successful picture books of Eric Carle is as busy as the Very Hungry Caterpillar itself. It has already had a short run in Brisbane in January and, after the current Adelaide season, will tour to Sydney next summer, showcase at a performing arts market in Montreal and play a three week stint at the Victory Theatre in New York.

From the moment Twinkle’s painter narrator, a rather Beckettian looking Russell Garbutt, climbs out of his rather Beckettian looking bin, the images unfold. Running his broad brush along the stage frame he makes ribbons of lush greenery and hedgerows appear for the blacklight antics of a constant procession of tulips and poppies, mosquitos and bees, a spider, a grasshopper, a belching frog and, of course, that ravenous crowd pleaser, the crunching, munching Very Hungry Caterpillar.

Director Simon Phillips has managed a marvellous fluency with the images dramaturg Richard Tulloch has adapted from among Carle’s thirty or so picture books. Designed by Richard Jeziorney and constructed by puppet maker Al Martinez and his team, the creatures range from the three dimensional bees and caterpillar, to the flat, segmented lion, elephant and crocodiles. Guided by the talented Peter Wilson, the five puppeteers, swathed in black, unfold a succession of surprises and delights as hungry crocodiles escape from towering elephants and large pink draperies become bird and butterfly wings.
The set is deliciously lit by Nick Schlieper and particular mention must be made of Ian McDonald’s irrepressible score. Unleashing every possible musical possibility, it is full of wit and madcap energy. From brass and bass drum to jazzy sax, swelling organ fugues and full blown fanfares to the rising sun, McDonald’s contribution is a crucial one to the success of the piece. Like a Chuck Jones cartoon, every bouncing creature has a bell, a whistle, a jews harp, a hurdy gurdy, a theremin, or some other zany operatic morsel.

Everybody’s having fun here and Cate Fowler’s commitment to Twinkle Twinkle Little Fish has paid off. Like that Hungry Caterpillar it has been in its cocoon for a while and now is ready to spread its very confident wings.