

Child's play with a difference

By TOM JACOBS
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What sort of theater does one stage for children? For most people, the answer seems to be watered-down, musical versions of fairy tales.

Will and Dion Alden Holt have a better idea. They're interested in tell-

REVIEW

ing tales kids can relate to directly. They're interested in using theater to help kids face their fears directly and understand that life isn't as scary as it might seem.

"Max and Zoey, Zoey and Max," their latest collaboration, is receiving its world premiere at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys. It is a wonderful way for parents to introduce their 3- to 8-year-old children to theater. It also may stimulate some worthwhile parent-child conversations.

This 50-minute musical, which was commissioned by the Back Alley, consists of adaptations of two of Dion Holt's short stories. The first deals with chicken pox; the second, with the strange noises kids hear between the time Mom turns off the bedroom light and the time they finally fall asleep.

In both cases, the Holts try to demystify the strange and scary. In the first episode, they explain how the body fights off disease by having two groups of kids from the audience engage in a tug-of-war. Later, they give the kids little red dots to stick on their faces. Message: Don't be scared of changes in your body.

In the second episode, the Holts deal with the fear of night

THE FACTS

- **The play:** "Max and Zoey, Zoey and Max."
 - **Where:** Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys.
 - **When:** 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, through Aug. 6 (and Aug. 26 through Sept. 17).
 - **Starring:** Lisa Gates, Terri Girvin and Ken Hoit.
 - **Behind the scenes:** Written by Dion Alden Holt and Will Holt. Music by Will Holt. Directed by Gretchen Corbett.
 - **Tickets:** \$6.50. For more information, call (818) 780-2240.
 - **Our rating:** ★★★★★
- ★★★★ — don't miss it; ★★★ — worth your while; ★★ — has its moments; ★ — if you must; Ⓣ — don't bother.

noises by having the audience members make such sounds themselves. The hope is that after these kids have been making their own calls and cackles, they might not be quite so frightened by the sounds they hear in the night.

These are well-thought-out pieces, augmented by Will Holt's charming music and bright performances by Lisa Gates, Terri Girvin and Ken Hoit. Gretchen Corbett directed.



Ken Hoit, left, Terri Girvin and Lisa Gates star in "Max and Zoey, Zoey and Max" at the Back Alley Theatre.