

# PARENTS DATELINE

## Children's Theater Max and Zoey

You're not sure if you've entered the Back Alley Theater or a playground in the twilight zone. A little girl in the audience implores, "Can I go play with Zoey?" while her mother tries to get settled into the chair. Before mom has time to think, the bright-eyed, pig-tailed actress on stage squeaks, "Sure, come on up!"



Max (Ken Hoyt), Zoey (Terri Girvin), and mom (Lisa Gates) show that juvenile problems are worthy of artistic effort.

The girl scrambles onto the planks and joins the other young audience members building towers and turrets out of shiny blocks.

In this theater with fantastic purple and sea-green walls, bulwarks against adult rationality, the children make Zoey (an adult actress) their

age and their friend. Already the boundary between fact and fiction has dissolved, and the preshow mood of *Max and Zoey*, *Zoey and Max* has been set.

Commissioned by the Back Alley Theater, composer and lyricist Will Holt and children's author Dion Alden Holt have created a clever adventure, based on the antics of their grandchildren, for 2 to 8 year olds. Audience members play an instrumental role in this musical journey through two stories, "Zoey and the Red Dots" and "Max and the Night Noises."

Red dots are the measles, and the drama helps Zoey learn what "contagious" means and how germs infect the body. The children in the audience choose to be good body-bugs or bad body-bugs, as they have a tug of war on stage to determine if Zoey gets the measles. A twirling mirror ball sends a prism of light-dots dashing across the ceiling and floor, covering the audience with the dreaded dots.

"Max and the Night Noises" explores the dark side of the imagination, as the audience becomes an orchestra of slithering sssssss sounds, moans and shrieks. Max has an attack of night fright and must find the courage to crawl across the monster-infested floor of his bedroom into the safety of his mother's bed, until he's led back to confront and conquer the demons.

Max, played by Ken Hoyt, and Zoey, Terri Girvin, haven't forgotten what it's like to be 4 years old, sliding and crawling all over the floor. The mother, Lisa Gates, lends stability and centeredness to the piece without being overly sentimental and sweet. But the children are the real stars in this play that illustrates childhood's imaginative nature. And the youngsters in the audience get the message that they're not just "dumb kids" and that their concerns are worthy of dramatic representation.

Families can view the play Saturdays and Sundays at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Performances continue through Oct. 29. Find the theater at 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. For reservations, call (818) 780-2240. All tickets are \$6.50.

— Sandra Engeland

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