

RANDY LEFFINGWELL / Los Angeles Times



*Will and Dion Alden Holt: Two toddler cousins provided all the inspiration.*

## **Max, Zoey Are for Real**

**C**hicken pox, scary night noises, bedtime delaying tactics: "Max & Zoey, Zoey & Max," a slice-of-life musical for children at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys, has had preschoolers and parents laughing in self-recognition since it opened in July.

That pleases the husband-and-wife team who wrote it. Composer Will Holt ("Me and Bessie" and "A Walk on the Wild Side") and Dion Alden Holt based the show on two real-life 4-year-olds—Dion Holt's grandchildren.

"Max and Zoey are first cousins, and inseparable," said Dion Holt. "All I do is listen to them; everything in the show is taken from something that really happened."

So, Zoey really did stick red dots on herself because Max had chicken pox and she wanted it too; the "Night Noises" segment was written because Max was afraid of the dark and "there

really is a Warren the Garbage Man who makes a lot of noise."

Will Holt, who wrote the show and the music, found it a surprising challenge:

"I hated going to children's theater when I was a kid. It was so awful. If kids are going to want to keep going to the theater, it has to be an exciting, involving experience for them."

To that end, audience participation is a big part of the show. Kids can take part in a tug-of-war, build with blocks and sing monster noises.

"And parents are not bored," said Dion Holt. "They laugh on a different level." Such as when Max's tired Mom tries to get away with skipping pages of a bedtime story.

The real Max and Zoey, now 5, have taken a more conscious role in providing inspiration. "They called me up," Dion Holt said, "and asked for a story about the first day of school."

—LYNNE HEFFLEY